



# THESE TIMES

BY  
J. A. SPENDER

“ This is the true touchstone of all theories which regard man and the affairs of man :—does it suit his nature in general?—does it suit his nature as modified by his habits? ”

BURKE.



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## PREFACE

THE writer who puts his thoughts on public affairs into the form of a book runs the risk of being caught out by events which may happen between writing and going to press. In what follows I have endeavoured to confine myself to the ground-plan which is likely to remain very much what it is, whatever decisions may be taken in Geneva or Downing Street during the next few months. There are hazards even in this, and these chapters need to be dated as the thoughts at a given moment of a journalist, who has endeavoured in Carlyle's phrase to "reconsider himself."

J. A. S.

WELL HILL HOUSE,  
CHELSFIELD, KENT.  
*March 31, 1934.*



# THESE TIMES

## CHAPTER I

### A POINT OF DEPARTURE

#### I

SOME peoples are born to revolutions, others have revolutions thrust upon them, but it would be a pity if we merely muddled into a revolution, for revolutions are things which are least suited to the British method of muddling through.

But we may do so if we are not clearer about the nature of our institutions than many writers and speakers appear to be. Take, for instance, the recent debate between Sir Stafford Cripps and the orthodox Constitutionalists. Everybody scolded Sir Stafford. Nobody said that he was absolutely right when he told the Labour party that they could not carry their programme by the ordinary parliamentary procedure. And yet this is obviously true. The banking and finance part of it alone—the part which is said to be essential to all the rest—would need to be effected by a *coup de main*, including the suppression of the press, if only to curtail the period of confusion and panic which otherwise would cause the assets of the

capitalist society to vanish into space in the process of conveying them to the Socialist State. Nothing could be less suited to this operation than the laborious passing of an Act of Parliament through all its stages in teeth of the opposition which even a small minority in a predominantly Socialist Parliament would offer. The method would have to be that of government by decree, and if the law-courts questioned its validity, they too would have to be suppressed.

It is absurd to scold Sir Stafford Cripps for telling us these things, and still more so for those who advocate the programme to profess themselves shocked. The only respect in which Sir Stafford goes astray is in vowing an eternal attachment to democracy. It is common form for the advocates of revolutionary policies to make this profession when they start out, but they very quickly abandon it as they go forward. Their notion that something called a "mandate" entitles them to override what their fellow-citizens call law and constitution is fatal both to Parliament and to democracy, for democracy is nothing without Parliament. The Executives which use power in this way have everywhere extinguished Parliament, and by so doing killed democracy. They were bound to do so, for their policies are of a kind from which there is no retreat, and which would be ruined if referred back to the electors owing to the objections of Parliament or the expiry of its legal term. Some "left-wing" politicians have told us frankly that if they have not completed the new order and made it final and irrevocable within the term of the British Parliament, they will go on and take as much time as they need

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or choose. Again, they do well to be frank, but it is absurd to speak of this as democracy. It is Sovietism, Hitlerism, Fascism, and the death of democracy.

### 2

Disclaimers that this result is desired or intended are of no value. Whatever they intend, those who lay a greater weight on the parliamentary structure than it will bear will break it. In recent months it has become the fashion with some writers to reduce the British Constitution to a simple syllogism : Parliament is a Sovereign Assembly elected to carry out the will of the people, the will of the people is expressed in the programme of the party which wins an election ; Parliament therefore must clear all obstacles from its path and act ruthlessly in carrying out this programme, whatever it is. As a working theory for ordinary politics this serves well enough, but if the programme requires fundamental changes in the social order we shall find a dangerous fallacy lurking in both major and minor premiss.

Except in a convenient legal sense, Parliament is not sovereign, and the will of the people expressed at one election is never final (if the voice of the people were the voice of God, we should have to change our coats whenever our parties went out of power). There are all manner of things which Parliament cannot do, and parliamentary wisdom consists mainly in not trying to do them. The will of the people varies from election to election, and to provide opportunities for its changing phases is a chief part of a free Constitution. The *locus penitentiæ* is essential ; democracy is as

effectively destroyed when it is denied the opportunity of changing its mind as when it is trampled upon by an autocrat. The theory that one election justifies everything leads straight to tyranny by plebiscite—the most insidious of all the forms of tyranny, as we used to be taught. It was the method of the great Napoleon and his nephew, and to-day it is the method of the European dictators, all of whom protest that their power is founded on the will of the people ascertained at something which they call “elections.”

Let us then be grateful to Sir Stafford Cripps for having warned us of the dangers, and be careful before we give any school of politicians a mandate for policies which are likely to break Parliament or to entail the consequences that he foresees. Who wishes the end must be presumed to wish the means.

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So long as Parliament exists, it must do its business in its own way, and that way is inevitably, as Lord Passfield once said, the way of gradualness. It is the instrument of argument and reason, which means that it must respect minorities, give them reasonable opportunities for being heard and, so far as it can, adjust legislation to their objections and even to their prejudices. This is a very delicate art and undoubtedly requires the dull virtues of patience and forbearance, and it is for lack of these that so many Parliaments have made shipwreck.

The British Parliament in recent years has been groping along the edge of the unmapped boundary which divides the things that can from the things that

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cannot be settled by argument and reason, and once at least it came very near to going over the edge. Home Rule for Ireland was, I believe, a good and necessary thing, though in large part spoilt by the delay in conceding it. But to force it on Ulster proved beyond the capacity of the supposed Sovereign Parliament, and the attempt to force it took us out of the territory in which reason and argument prevail and into the territory in which the argument is force. All through 1913 and the first half of 1914 we were on the verge of civil war, and what would have happened if another sort of war had not intervened is still an uncomfortable conjecture. When we get on to this ground all arguments about the theoretical powers of either Parliament or electorate are waste of breath and ink.

### 4

I can understand a man thinking that drastic changes are so necessary that they must be carried through at once, no matter at what cost. But if so, let him measure and face the cost. If he vehemently advocates policies which are beyond the capacity of Parliament, while claiming to be a loyal democrat or parliamentarian, he will just muddle into revolution and be enormously surprised and alarmed when it comes.

I do not for a moment suppose that this will happen, but the first rule, if we do not want it to happen, is to keep our eye on the parliamentary boundary and have nothing to do with any policy which threatens to take us outside it. Outside it, we pass into the hands of



irresponsible factions seeking to seize and keep power, and the struggle between them would more probably than not leave us in the grip of the faction which would have the least mercy on advanced opinions. It is a misfortune even that we should seem to be manœuvring on the edge of this boundary, for that creates an atmosphere of alarm which is favourable to reaction. But in any case let us be clear that if we go over the boundary, the factions who fight outside it will care nothing for Parliament, liberty or democracy. Their warfare is waged by entirely different rules.

This is the moral of what is happening elsewhere in the world. All the factions are showing us that the things they want to do cannot be done in the parliamentary way. They are all of them quite convinced that their way is the only way, and when a politician gets this into his head, he ceases to be a parliamentarian and becomes a Pope. Parliament does not admit of Popes. Its root assumption is the fallibility of human beings, whose plans, schemes and methods of government need to be worked out by argument, give and take, compromise, trial and error. Parliaments, like nature, do nothing by leaps.

So when we have done all our talking about constitutional theory, the test is simply this—is the policy proposed susceptible to the parliamentary method? If it is not, the presumption is overwhelmingly against it, unless we are willing to sacrifice free institutions to get it adopted. When the advocates of a particular policy tell us that it will require the suspension of parliamentary methods, they warn us that we have to make this choice. If we choose the policy, it is

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useless to say that we dislike or object to its consequences.

But before we choose it seems the rational course to look about us, and consider from the abundant experience offered to us by the world to-day whether we should gain by the exchange of new lamps for old—whether we find the acceptable new light in Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, whether it may come to us from the America of Roosevelt or from some Utopia imagined by theorists and economists of the modern school. The chapters that follow are offered in the hope that they may be aids to reflection on this question. They glance at foreign and international affairs, for, unless we include these, we have no secure foundation for any domestic policy.

## CHAPTER II

### THE REVOLUTIONARY STATE

When Doctor Sangrado had persevered in the practice of bleeding his patients—killing by the very means which he had used for a cure—his man took the liberty of remonstrating upon the necessity of relaxing in a practice to which thousands of their patients had fallen sacrifices, and which was beginning to bring their names into disrepute. The Doctor answered, “I believe we have carried the matter a little too far ; but you must know that I have written a book upon the efficacy of the practice ; therefore, though every patient we have should die by it, we must continue the bleeding for the credit of the book.”

CHARLES JAMES FOX, *House of Commons*,  
November 28, 1777.

#### I

MANY people are so constituted that they feel a sense of pleasure at seeing the mighty cast down from their seats, irrespective of what may happen afterwards. This feeling underlies a great deal of the political unrest in the world to-day. No matter what follows, vast numbers rejoice at seeing Tsars and Emperors overthrown, eminent politicians sent to prison or concentration camps, wealthy Jews humiliated, and prosperous bourgeois taught to know their place. We call this emotion by various names, hatred of tyranny, passion for equality, love of justice. It is in

various degrees all this, but there mingles with it something else which is commonly described as "the inferiority complex"—a thing most dangerous to the world, inasmuch as it is a blind and helpless instinct which is at the mercy of any skilful demagogue who knows how to play on it.

The feelings aroused for and against Soviet Russia are the handiest illustration of the course of this emotion in Europe since the war. Russia in seventy years has passed from tyranny to tyranny, from poverty to poverty, from secret police to O.G.P.U. Before the war the Tsardom was the symbol of the most detested kind of tyranny to multitudes in western Europe, and, apart from certain cruel incidents, said to be inevitable in revolutions, its overthrow was hailed by immense numbers as a new dawn. Sympathy with those who had thrown off this yoke grew just in proportion as the other Governments, with characteristic blindness to the teachings of history, endeavoured by their aid and intervention to reinstate the former ruling class. During this period, millions of working people all over the world got it firmly into their heads, and not without reason, that the "capitalist" Governments were engaged in a deliberate conspiracy to quench a working-class uprising and to prevent the experiment of a Socialistic society being fairly tried. That idea has never been dislodged, and it has created a mental image of Soviet Russia which is intensified by every effort of the other Governments to isolate her or discredit her. These efforts have been many and foolish, for nothing was more to be desired than that it should have been possible to say truly that the Soviet Govern-

ment had been given every opportunity open to other Governments, and that its experiment, if it failed, had failed on its own demerits.

2

I have a large collection of books and pamphlets on Soviet Russia, and they warn me against treading rashly on this ground. Their contradictions are so many and so violent that one is driven to the conclusion that the witnesses who record their experiences have been visiting different countries, though for the purposes of mystification they call them by the same name. Yet, though the details vary and different eyes see entirely different crops growing on the same ground, the ground is distinguishable and the methods of ploughing and harrowing it are not in dispute. Confessedly we have to wait five years, and five years, and perhaps another five years, to see what the full crop will be, but it is not too soon to see what the methods are, and what is their general aim.

In dealing with this extraordinary country one is constantly driven to metaphors, and the images chase one another without regard to their coherence. Contrasted with western Europe, I see Russia as a vast looking-glass country, in which all the familiar faces and all that we call "values" are inverted. Western Europe has in all ages come to the conclusion that brains, intelligence, the faculty for managing and directing have in some sense a higher value than manual labour. Soviet Russia asserts the contrary. It asserts that manual labour has worth which places it above all other labour, and it started on its enterprise

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with a deliberate attempt to destroy or reduce to the lowest grade those who in other societies would be deemed the most useful and desirable citizens. Nearly all Europe believes, either sincerely or conventionally, that religion is the friend of man ; Russia on the contrary asserts that it is the enemy of man, the opiate of the poor, which must be extirpated like the traffic in cocaine. The chief part of Europe still believes that the prospect of gain for the individual is a necessary ingredient in the well-being of the State. Soviet Russia not only denies it but makes deliberate war on thrift, individual enterprise, and other qualities that attend the individual's effort to better himself.

Some of these inversions are so repugnant to what other people regard as common sense that we can hardly believe them to be sincere. But unless we do grasp that they are not only sincere but held with a fanaticism which makes them the religion of the hierarchy that governs Russia, we cannot begin to understand what is going on in that country. The history of the Soviet movement illustrates at each stage the actions and reactions, the difficulties and the struggles resulting from the attempt to enforce on the Russian people a doctrine which in most respects is the exact opposite of what is held and practised in other countries.

### 3

The details are voluminous, but there are certain well-marked stages which can be borne in mind. There was first the effort immediately after Lenin came to power to establish pure Communism, abolition of

money, distribution of a common product by State mechanism, which speedily broke down in chaos and confusion. Accompanying it was a ruthless drive against the "bourgeoisie" and the "intelligentsia" to make sure that there should be no nucleus for a counter-revolution. But Lenin, who was partly a practical man, discovered that the problem of feeding the people and keeping life going was beyond him on these methods, and worked gradually to the compromise of the "new economic policy" (N.E.P.) of 1922 by which the private trader obtained a controlled footing in the towns, and the peasants, who comprise the vast majority of the Russian people, were permitted to continue in the old way of private profit, and even promised undisturbed possession of their land. At this moment it seemed probable that Russia would develop, as France did after her Revolution, and the chief permanent result of her upheaval be the establishment of a Peasant Proprietary. One can imagine Lenin and Trotsky at this stage heaving a sigh of relief at having the immense and intolerable burden of feeding the Russian masses taken off their backs, and their hands set free to establish Socialism in the towns.

But in 1924 Lenin passed from the scene, and power now fell into the hands of the Communist old-guard, who had watched these developments with deep misgiving. They saw the "book," the holy gospel of their founder, Karl Marx, forgotten and Russia going the way of France, the most conservative, the most reactionary, the most capitalistic country in Europe. The gospel, they said, must be restored at once and all heretics compelled to conform. But in the brain of

their leader, Stalin, the original doctrine now took on a new form. Not only must the peasant-proprietary be rooted out, but the country must be industrialized on the latest capitalistic models, and as large a number of the rural population as possible compelled to lend a hand. On the face of it, a most paradoxical idea. Russia, seemingly the least suitable country in the world for such an experiment, was to be coerced into the highly specialized system of mass production evolved by capitalist industry, and just at the moment when the capitalist world was beginning to doubt whether it had not taken the wrong road.

## 4

Trotsky, who seems vainly to have protested that the Soviet was bound by its pledge to leave the peasants in possession of their lands, went into exile, and the way was cleared for the next "new economic policy," the policy of Stalin. The history of that has yet to be written, but the drive against the "Kulaks," i.e. the more thrifty and prosperous peasantry, who seemed on the way to establish themselves permanently as peasant proprietors, is described by those who witnessed it as the cruellest of all the episodes of the Russian Revolution. Thousands were killed in a vain resistance, thousands more relegated to Siberia and the waste-lands, and a multitude, treated as pariahs by the Government, died of disease or starvation by the way-side. Never was the inversion of ordinary ideas so completely and tragically illustrated. The thrifty, the deserving, the useful, as they would be considered in any other society, were specially singled out as enemies



of the State to be hunted down and rooted out by all the resources at its disposal.

Argument at this point becomes useless. The normal western man cries out at the savagery and ruthlessness of it only to be met by appeal to a supposed higher law which makes the sacrifice imperative in the interests of the new religion, expounded in the gospel of Karl Marx. It is a sacrifice, I have had pointed out to me, which was shared by the whole Russian people, for the war upon the Kulaks so disarranged agriculture that large numbers of innocent townsfolk were reduced to starvation or near it in the following year. But though the people suffered, the great institution of the collective farm is said to be firmly established, and highly efficient examples of it may even now be seen in working.

While the war on the Kulaks was raging, the Five Year Plan—the first instalment of the second new economic policy—was going forward. The whole capitalist world—and especially the United States, Germany and Great Britain—was now being drawn upon to plant on Russian soil an apparatus of industry which should exceed and excel what any of these countries had erected on their own soil. The capitalist nations were to be shown that Communist Russia could beat them at their own game, and for this millions of ardent Communists were willing to tighten their belts and endure any privation. The first five years might have to be followed by a second five years, and the second by a third, but at the end of the vista the Russian Communists saw something surpassing Bethlehem and Sheffield and Essen combined, mon-

strous power stations, colossal factories belching smoke and producing standardized goods in quantities exceeding the utmost contemplated by Krupps or Henry Ford. One trembles to think what William Morris or John Ruskin would have said about it, but there is no doubt at all that it kindles ardent and passionate thoughts in the minds of the Russian youth.

## 5

The wheel has now come full circle, and the final inversion is achieved by Socialism inverting itself. Instead of the escape from industrialism and the return to nature and the simple life which the early Socialists had in view, the new Socialism deliberately chooses for its goal the most forbidding of the developments of capitalist industry—that which has hitherto been denounced as leading to the worst kind of wage-slavery. It prides itself that its apparatus of State compulsion enables it to organize factories and subdue human beings to the needs of machine production in a manner that the hardest of mass producers would not venture in other countries. It has no trade unions to contend with ; it has a variety of ingenious ways—the granting or withholding of passports, the varying of food-rations and so forth—of turning the human stream in this direction or that ; it makes idleness and malingering offences against the State and punishable by law. Given that the Russians are the kind of people that can be subdued to machine industry, there should be no limits to this process ; indeed, it would be surprising if an entire State thus concentrating on a given aim and calling to its aid some of the most

capable and experienced of foreign engineers had not already produced some very remarkable results. The tales brought back about the great Dnieprostroi Power Station, and the colossal Magnetogorsk factories are entirely credible, and not, I imagine, exaggerated.

Capitalist critics go astray when they seek to belittle these achievements, but clearly they raise questions of the most formidable kind. When the foreign engineers have gone home, will the Russian people be able to work and repair the immense plant provided for them? Can they adopt this final development or excrescence of the capitalist system and discard all the antecedent causes and factors of which in capitalist countries it was the logical result? Can they avoid the errors in the measurement of demand which have brought it to at least a temporary standstill in these countries? Can the fashions, tastes and appetites of the Russian people be so developed by conscious planners and propagandists as to dispense with the price mechanism which in other countries brings supply and demand into some sort of relation? I cannot pretend to any knowledge which entitles me even to guess the answers to these questions, and it is possible that they will never be answered to the satisfaction of western economists. For a Government which acknowledges none of the accepted standards of accounting, which is in a position to make good the deficiencies of one industry with the surpluses of another, to turn loss into profit by subsidizing the failures, and in the last resort to compel its people to accept the results, whatever they are, may go on indefinitely and avoid what the rest of the world calls bankruptcy. The limit in such a case is the

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endurance of the people rather than what elsewhere would be called the solvency of industry, and the Russian people are immensely submissive and enduring.

In a certain sense it is impossible not to admire the bold defiance which, in adopting capitalist methods, the Russian planners are throwing to capitalist experience. They plan to provide an unlimited supply for an unknown demand in the teeth of the patent fact that the rest of the world is in full retreat from this process. They may be right, but enormous efforts to provide the plant of industry in waste places to which the population has yet to be brought, or to cater for customers who have yet to be born seems to the normal eye another of those inversions which belong to the world through the looking-glass. There are times when all other emotions aroused by the Russian upheaval are swallowed up in amazement that human beings can be found to take the enormous risks of these experiments either for the present or the future. The errors of individuals in the unplanned economics are many and disastrous, but they are relatively small errors which cancel each other out without great hurt to the community. But the errors of the public planner devastate a multitude. If he is a decimal point wrong in his estimates of seed corn and corn for consumption, he may starve tens of thousands who would otherwise have managed to keep alive. If he has miscalculated by a fraction the quantity of boots, clothes, or soap required, he may compel millions to go unshod and unwashed, and doom them to perish in an Arctic winter. If he is planning for a future beyond rational foresight he may multiply all these

errors and commit a great country to a course which is unsuited to its character and genius, and from which it will have painfully to find its way back. That men can be found who have the courage and self-confidence and belief in their own immunity from the common liability to err, which alone can justify them in undertaking these tasks, is perhaps in the whole of this affair the greatest marvel of all.

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Now, whatever may be said about this experiment and whatever hopes may be founded on it, it is clearly something entirely different from the image of it which has got lodged in the minds of workmen in western Europe. Something, also, one may add, entirely different from what the Russian Communists had in mind when they carried through their revolution. The workers have not achieved equality either of status or of earnings. They have passed from one yoke to another, and if a proportion of their new masters had "proletarian" origin these have in course of time become a professional bureaucracy little, if at all, different from that of capitalist countries, except that they are more tyrannical and wield greater power. The ideas of law and justice are substantially the same in the new Russia as in the old, the will of the Dictatorship being substituted for that of the Tsar, with the corresponding changes of persons or classes whom it is desired to keep down. Now, as formerly, individual liberty and justice count for nothing against the necessities of the State. For workmen to organize to resist the State planner is as great a crime in the

new Russia as to agitate against the Tsar was in the old Russia.

It may be the destiny of the Russian planners to prove by their own practice that the old Socialists spoke truly when they said that modern industry entailed and required the servitude of the workers, and having at their disposal a people which only eighty years ago was in a condition of serfdom, they may conceivably bring their system to a perfection which is beyond the reach of the western captains of industry with their less malleable human material. But if they do, it is difficult to see what encouragement or inspiration can be drawn from their example by the workers of other countries, whose complaint is that freedom and equality are denied them under the present system.

But this issue is still very much in doubt. It is equally possible—perhaps on the balance more so—that the adoption of capitalist methods of production will compel a return to capitalist methods of rewarding labour. The most recent visitors to Russia report that the theory of an ascendant and specially favoured class of manual workers is visibly cracking under the strain of specialized labour. The foreign engineers and managers require remuneration on the scale that rules in other countries and cannot be submitted to the control of the manual workers without stultifying the purposes for which they are engaged. The young Russians whom they are training to take their places catch the infection, and require in some way or other to be specially remunerated. The methods by which this is disguised to give a superficial appearance of con-

formity to Communist theory are many and ingenious, but it is a process which, if it goes on, can only end in the restoration of the bourgeoisie, re-christened with Bolshevist names. This finally is the serpent in the Communist Eden, and an at least possible result of the effort to beat capitalism at its own game—a game which hitherto has been played only by capitalist rules. If so, their weary journey through the waste spaces of the Russian looking-glass land will in the end have brought these passionate pilgrims back to their starting point.

7

The idea of working for service and not for profit is a very honourable one which no generous-minded man will wish to disparage. There is no happy life which does not at least mingle service with profit. The young Communists who tighten their belts for the glory of the Soviet Republic are no fit objects for mockery. Whether in pursuit of their plan they are entitled to inflict on the millions of the fellow-citizens the hardships, the shortage, the dragooning and the martyrdom which have attended their effort until now is a different question. The havoc which economic theory works in the human brain in the twentieth century is only second, if at all second, to that caused by religious dogma in the ages of faith. It is reckless of life or happiness, and in a semi-Oriental people takes on some of the characteristics of a Mohammedan holy war. *Das Capital* is by now as drenched in blood as the Athanasian creed. We may make all the allowances required by the special circumstances of Russia, and

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regard its recent history as one of the stupendous struggles between theory and fact, reason and a dream, which periodically sweep over mankind, and hope that out of it may come eventually some move onward for the Russian people and some instruction for the rest of the world. But we need not idealize it, apologize for its methods, or pretend that it is something different from what it is.



# CHAPTER III

## THE COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY STATES

### I

**R**USSIA is committed to her new order. Alternatives to it are not in sight ; counter-revolutions, if they were possible, would only make bad worse. To deal wisely with it has been one of the capital problems of Europe since the war, and Europe has behaved stupidly and blindly, behaved as people generally do when they are in a fright. The reactions from Bolshevist Russia have thus been as devastating in Europe as the practice of Bolshevism in Russia herself.

Europe has its excuses, for among the other characteristics of the looking-glass land is that it behaves to its neighbours in exactly the opposite way to that which they think proper in their behaviour to each other. They may scheme and plot to check one another's influence, overreach one another in the race for power, but they have a code of manners which requires that they shall profess amity and goodwill—or leave the contrary professions to the press—and, above all, refrain from meddling with each other's domestic affairs. Russia, on the contrary,

announced from the housetops that she intended, if she could, to upset all her neighbours' Governments, to purge them of the capitalist heresy, to pass them through the same fiery and cleansing ordeal to which she had voluntarily submitted herself. To foment strikes and revolutionary movements, and for that purpose to provide missionaries who should go out into all lands and spread the gospel of Communism was for the Russians a chief part of what other nations would call their foreign policy—a part for which heavy sacrifices were made by or imposed upon the Russian people.

All this followed strictly from their theory. Communism in their thoughts was not merely a policy—it was a religion bearing with it the seed of redemption for all mankind, a religion which, like Christianity, knew no boundaries and no distinctions of race or even colour. The missionary field embraced China, Japan, India, Egypt as well as Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy. None were to be excluded from the new gospel, no soil was too forbidding for the seed to be sown. To the Communist vision the whole world was waiting for the message, and nothing could exceed the zeal, sincerity and spirit of self-sacrifice with which the Apostles of this Evangel set about their task.

But the result of these efforts was largely the opposite of what was intended, and it soon appeared that the Bolshevist missionaries were preparing wrath for their friends in other countries. Lenin at least ought to have known better, for his naïve belief that the German army would melt on the hoisting of the Red Flag in Petrograd had landed him in the humiliation of the

Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. But he persisted in his delusion that the whole world was trembling on the brink of revolution, and could be pushed over by Bolshevik propaganda. Working on the general unrest which followed the war, this had local and temporary successes which were altogether insufficient to make the cause prevail, but more than enough to scare the capitalist Governments and peoples and drive most of them off their balance. Millions of alarmed bourgeois were now swept to the opposite extreme, demolishing the Liberal half-way houses in their rush. It was now said that the ordinary resources of government were unequal to these perilous times, that fire must be cast out with fire, and Communism fought with its own weapons by executives as supreme and irresponsible as the dictators of Moscow. The thought chimed in with the general despair at the political confusion and economic chaos which followed the war, and immense numbers began to cry out for strong men and resolute Governments. Communism thus became the parent of Fascism and Nazism.

Russia had blazed the trail, and Russia provided the technique for the reaction. In all essentials the Russian working model has been followed with extraordinary exactitude by the organizers of the Fascist movements in Italy, Germany and other countries which believed themselves to be threatened by the Russian example. All deify the "leader," and pay him homage as to a divinity ; all proclaim the absolute supremacy of one party and the infallibility of its doctrine, and the inadmissibility of any other. The variations are few and accidental. In Russia the supreme State tries

to extinguish religion, in Italy to neutralize it, in Germany to annex it, but all realize that it is one of those dangerous elemental forces which must either be subdued or brought under control, lest it become a rival power. In Russia, where liberty was unknown, the ground was already sufficiently prepared, but in Italy and Germany, where the names and forms of freedom were held in a certain respect, it was thought necessary to conduct a special propaganda which should hold them up to ridicule and contempt, and denounce Parliament, Liberalism, free opinion and a free press as "rotting corpses" to which virile countries should scorn to be tied. The Germans added a special animosity against Jews and a fanatical belief in the superiority of the Nordic race; the Italians spoke of themselves as heirs of the Roman Empire. These are local details which do not disguise the essential similarity of all the systems as forms of government. All are borrowed from Russia.

The propaganda of all the sects, Bolshevist, Nazi, or Fascist, seems to those who stand outside them to verge on insanity. It seems incredible that sane men can think of themselves or their nation or their race or their doctrine in the inflated terms which dictators habitually use, or, alternatively, that they can despise their fellow men to the degree which the use of these terms implies. The Englishman, whose national humour it is to depreciate himself, reads the German literature of self-glorification with a feeling that it must be intentional burlesque. Who can take seriously these slogans, this boasting, this evident appeal to the baser passions? Yet judged by results the inventors

of this art must be presumed to know their own business. Their theory of the infallible autocrat requires a perpetual self-assertion on his part or theirs. Doubts, hesitations, criticism, the admission that there are possible other views, that the prescribed specific may not work, belong to the old order, parliamentarism, debate, argument, dragging its slow length along, while the enemy is at the gate. The new method is that of the village fair, and the band plays its loudest when the public has its teeth drawn.

Only in this hypnotic atmosphere can the vendors of panaceas pursue their trade, and to produce it the dictators annex the whole stock-in-trade of the demagogue, and carry it to a perfection undreamt of by the original patentees. They have the great advantage that the subjects or victims of their experiments are gagged and cannot, when they return to consciousness, get up and chase their temporary masters from the scene. The difficulty of measuring the value of any of these experiments is, in fact, that we can never know the results on the testimony of those who are the subjects of them and best qualified to judge of them. All build up an imposing façade for the inspection of the foreigner, great factories, model farms, welfare centres, reclaimed lands, trunk roads, but at what cost these are provided, and what is the standard of life for the mass of people, we know next to nothing, expressions of dissent being barred, and the newspapers under the control of the Government. In this way the dictators not only deprive themselves of essential knowledge, but prevent others from benefiting by their experience.

It is the claim of western dictators that their revolutions have been all but bloodless—great and beneficial changes carried through at the cost of a few hundred or a few thousand lives in happy contrast with the bloody sacrifice of the Russian Revolution. But death is not the only measure of human suffering. For some of the thousands outlawed, degraded, persecuted, deprived of the means of earning their living, driven into exile, death has been a happy release. Most onlookers became aware of something nasty and brutish in the German Revolution, which was worse than primitive savagery. They felt that humanity was being insulted in the degrading forms of torture invented for Jews and Communists. Men who acted thus could have no sense of the dignity and value of human kind. The supreme State may demand its victims, but there used to be a certain chivalry in the treatment of the political offender, even when his life was forfeit.

The vast submissiveness of multitudes under this terrorism has been a discovery of the modern dictators. Their opponents do not die fighting ; they change their colours, they keep their mouths shut, they fly across the border. Special circumstances have contributed in Germany : the natural submissiveness of the people to authority, the exhaustion of their vitality during and after the war, the fear that if they do not accept one kind of dictatorship they will fall into the hands of another and worse. The modern armoury is so formidable that the impossibility of dislodging any

resolute body of men which has captured it and is prepared to use it induces fatalism. In the absence of dissent and with all the newspapers and the wireless at its disposal, the predominant party is able to make an unchallenged claim to have effected a great national renaissance, and to enlist a large body of supporters who will proclaim that it is true. To deny that this is sincerely believed, and that a sincere belief in it may make it in some measure true is fortunately not necessary. The Hitler youth is as sincere a zealot as the young Russian Communist, and sincere zealots in politics as in religion are generally in the long run better than their creed. The different types of government have their characteristic virtues and defects, and that the Fascist and Bolshevist types will develop their virtues and put their defects behind them is the hope of their neighbours.

Most of this is their business, and our power of influencing it is very limited. But there is one respect in which the development of the Fascist type is the business of everybody, and that is its development in a highly nationalistic form. Here it diverges from its Bolshevist begetters who at least profess an internationalist creed which merges all races and nations in a vision of mankind awaiting a common redemption. That, as we have seen, has inconveniences for neighbours who do not accept this faith, but it does not threaten a revival of the nationalist quarrels and rivalries which brought Europe to its catastrophe in 1914. Hitlerism does, and Fascism at one time seemed to. Disclaimers again are of little value, if only for the reason that those who plan war are much more likely to disclaim

than to avow their intention. Unquestionably the preaching of undisguised militarist doctrine by a Power which has many grievances and the indoctrinating of its youth with an intense military ardour tend to create an atmosphere in which war becomes more probable.

## 3

A panic about militarist Germany parallel to that about Bolshevist Russia would tend to a similar result and make a fighting issue so much the more probable. But to persuade ourselves that there is no danger would be equally unwise. I have before me Professor Banse's notorious book ("Raum und Volk Im Weltkriege"), and my first impulse is to dismiss it as deliberate burlesque. Many passages in it are beyond parody ; the fiercest satirist of war could not put into the mouth of a militarist language which was better calculated to reduce him to a wicked absurdity. In this country no stage warrior could venture to indulge in it without bringing down the house in hisses and ribald laughter. Yet it must mean something that this man, notorious for his opinions, is appointed to be one of the principal instructors of youth and only disavowed in deference to foreign protests.

Herr Hitler's "Mein Kampf" (in its original unexpurgated edition), the writings of Herr Rosenberg, the official philosophic instructor of Nazi youth, the outpourings of Goering and Goebbels make a noise only a little less strident in English ears, and point to an emotional condition which, however much it may be explained or condoned by historical circum-



stances, is not encouraging if we are thinking of world peace. The most merciful explanation is that these orators and writers are thinking not of the foreigner but of their own people, who need these stimulants to drive them into national unity, but this in its turn requires us to think of the German masses as highly susceptible to these appeals—a collective state of mind which is not reassuring to Germany's neighbours. We should think an English Prime Minister or Foreign Minister mad if he spoke to us in these terms, and still more so, if at the same time he were appealing to his next-door neighbour to disarm on the ground of his pacific disposition and intentions.

At the best we are dealing with a mentality so different from our own that intelligent contact with it seems almost out of reach. Once more, as in the case of Russia, we are driven back on what is the wise thing to do, and for once the wise thing is to wait and see with as little loss of composure as possible in the meantime. It is extremely improbable that except under great provocation Germany will disturb the peace for several years to come and in those years many things may happen which may incline her not to disturb it at all. Her doctrine cuts her off from Russia, her interests from Italy, and she has just concluded a pact of non-aggression with Poland which lays to rest for ten years the most dangerous of all the local causes of quarrel. If we must for a time longer live in a fighting world these are not bad conditions for keeping the peace, and we had better take advantage of them to meet all rational German demands for equality of status. Let us pray, meanwhile, that an

attack on Russia by Japan may not stir slumbering ambitions in Germany and Poland towards expansion eastward.

## 4

There is a general, if rather vague, feeling that the anti-democratic upheaval in Europe bodes ill for free institutions in Great Britain. I believe that to be exaggerated. In none of the countries in which it has been overthrown has parliamentary government had more than the briefest history. The Reichstag was never a Parliament in our sense of the word, and, as some of us thought and said at the time, Germany made a serious mistake when she adopted our model of responsible government in her Weimar Constitution. She had far better have followed the American example of an independent executive for her Federation of States, as it then was. Italian unity and the Italian Parliament were children of yesterday, the Russian Duma but a brief and troubled episode of the Tsardom. Even in France parliamentary government is not yet seventy years old. In Britain alone has the thing we call parliamentary government—a government by an Executive responsible to Parliament—any deep roots or long history. It is a peculiar evolution of the British temperament which has never so far been successfully transplanted in the soil of any big foreign country, though it appears to thrive in many of the smaller ones. It requires tolerance, forbearance, honesty and modesty in those who work in it, and can no more than the European copies of it be made the instruments of prophets and ideologues dispensing

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infallible panaceas. The British sense of humour and the British dislike of antics and heroics in its public men are its chief safeguards, but if the national character should change in these respects under the influence of passionate demagogues or an excited press, it will be in danger of the same fate as has befallen others.

## CHAPTER IV

### MOULDING HUMANITY

#### I

**P**ERHAPS the strangest thing, psychologically, in the post-war dictatorships is the success of a few individuals, Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, in creating men in their own image. These four, aided by a little group of master-craftsmen, have poured out a multitude of class-warriors, Nordics, Nazis, Fascists, all as different from the hitherto prevailing types of humanity as Alsatians, dachshunds, and wolf-hounds are from terriers and retrievers. Economists in the nineteenth century invented something that they called the economic man, but this timid and rather likeable creature never really came to life, whereas these others have not only become incarnate, but breed and multiply and rage and tear. How is it done?

The artificers have had peculiarly soft material to work upon. Vast numbers of all classes had lost their bearings during and after the war. The confusion in Russia, the sense of defeat in Germany, and of thwarted nationalism in Italy ; the immense levelling down when currencies lost their value, the struggles of the middle-class to keep their status when their money went, and of the labouring classes to keep alive, the

nameless fears and suspicions by which large numbers were haunted, their unemployment and the boredom and hopelessness to which it gave rise—all this prolonged over years had drained character and personality, and reduced the normal resisting power of the human subject to a low level. Human beings over a great part of Europe were seldom so susceptible as in these years. It was intrinsically probable that crowd-compellers, promising new ways of salvation, new victories to retrieve defeats, providing diversion and excitement, appealing to pride and self-respect, would have unusual success. It was almost of no importance what the crowd-compellers said, so long as they said it in a loud enough voice. The appeal to unreason fell on specially favourable ground.

But the new crowd-compellers were not like the old. They were not content to pour out their words and let them evaporate in mist, to let their crowds go home after an emotional hour and trust that a proportion of them would give the desired vote at some future election. They resolved to grip them, possess them body and soul, refashion them according to designs precisely laid down in their studios and laboratories. This is the new fact in most of these modern movements. Other reformers have claimed that their proposals meet existing human demands and needs, or at least acknowledged the necessity of adjusting their schemes to an existing human nature. These have in mind new types of society for which the necessary human beings must be created, if they do not exist.

The German method is the newest, and in some

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ways the simplest and most completely self-consistent. The object from the beginning is to breed to a new type, said to be a pure type, free from the alloys which enfeeble and devirilize the existing types. The material must therefore be screened and cleansed, and all impurities, especially the Jew impurity, ground out of it. It must be as pure Aryan, as the Russian is pure proletarian, before the artificers can begin to work on it. The pattern stamped on it must then be so simple and uniform that the largest numbers can be turned out in the shortest time, for the process is one of mass production.

Since much of the material had got stamped with other forms and patterns when it came into the hands of these artificers, the treatment had to be drastic and ruthless in the first stage. The alien elements, Communist, Jew, non-Aryan, had to be eliminated at all costs. But this is only a first stage affecting mostly the elderly and middle-aged, who will soon pass from the scene or can be hastened off it. The artificers have in view a time when the human material will come into their hands fresh and soft from the cradle, and if properly handled, will take the desired pattern automatically and unconsciously.

Priests and dogmatists have practised on youth in all ages, and have seriously believed that, if they can catch it young enough, they can do anything with it. But they have generally been at two disadvantages : their hold slackens as the child grows up, and try as they will, they cannot make their dogmas cover more than a small part of life. The modern artificer covers the whole of life and all ages. The schools do the

rough shaping, the universities the finishing, the "party" takes the finished article and instructs it how to go through the prescribed motions. Since it is to "think with blood" and not with its head, this is comparatively easy.

There is a precise technique of the business at all stages. The most useful quality of the material is its "suggestibility" in the infant stage. That must be worked upon with suitable toys and symbols, flags, noises, gestures and pictures, which suggest that the world is really like what the dictators wish it to be. There comes a moment when the creature must be taught to read, but its artificers are ready with books which confirm this impression and exclude all other impressions. There comes another moment—a rather dangerous one—when the creature shows signs of those uneasy stirrings and emotions that are called spiritual and artistic or other awakenings that belong to sex. But here again his artificers are ready for him. They have a special kind of religion which sanctifies and glorifies their view of life, special kinds of music, art and poetry expressing the kind of emotions which the creature may safely be permitted to indulge.

This is not a burlesque. It is the actual process avowed by the Nazi instructors of youth and declared by them to be the logical consequence of their conception of the homogeneous "totalitarian" State—the State covering the whole of life and claiming the absolute allegiance of all its members. That, they say, can only be realized if the State succeeds in fashioning its people to its own pattern. All the

dictators agree upon the point ; all practise the same method upon the youth of their countries and all protest that, so far, the subjects of their experiments find it most exhilarating. Never, we are told, was there such happiness, such a sense of liberty and uplift as may be found among young Communists, young Nazis and young Fascists—the select young men who are the instruments of their systems. We need not dispute it ; however it may be distorted, the idea of submission to the will and service of the State appeals to generous instincts ; the assertion that the world is being ruined by self-will and lack of discipline has too much plausibility, and especially in countries which have lived in or on the edge of anarchy. Most neophytes take to new doctrines with enthusiasm, and especially to doctrine which reverses the wisdom of the elders.

Whatever we may think about these systems, they raise formidable questions for the future of civilization—questions in some ways more serious than those raised by any change in political forms. Most of us have been brought up to believe that the progressive societies were those which gave their members the greatest freedom to live their own lives and think their own thoughts, and that to encourage varieties of character and thought was the way to enrich life and discover truth. We are now faced with a total denial of these axioms, as we supposed them to be. Variety is now declared to be a vice, and it is said to be a positive object of the State to stamp a uniform character on its members. We were brought up to believe that the free circulation of knowledge about



one another, and free criticism about each other's institutions and ways of life would be helpful and in the long run make for peace. We are now faced with the probability that three or four great nations will, so far as their rulers can make them, be sealed books to their neighbours. Foreign correspondents will report on sufferance, but always with the knowledge that anything that is not flattering will bring them under suspicion, and that much of the truth could not be told at all without exposing them to the penalties laid down for the new crime known as "atrocities-mongering."

For all our modern apparatus of news-gathering and quick transmission we are already, in respect of some of these countries, back in mediæval conditions. Everyone suspects the official news, but the gathering of any other is a furtive and secret business—letters smuggled past the censors, travellers' diaries written after the traveller has returned, personal impressions depending on the person's bias, things impossible to check in the absence of a free opinion expressed by a free press in the country itself. A large part of the history of these times will have to be recovered, as we recover seventeenth- and eighteenth-century history, from the dispatches written by Ambassadors to their Governments under diplomatic privilege. We have hints that profoundly interesting struggles between persons and interests are going on in Russia and Germany, the issue of which is of the utmost importance to their neighbours, but we are not permitted to know the facts which would make an independent judgment possible.

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Even more important, the peoples of these countries are only permitted to know about us or any of their neighbours what their rulers think good for them. A few foreign newspapers trickle in, but for informing a whole people they are negligible. Foreign books unacceptable to authority are stopped at the frontier, and translations of them forbidden. The official newspapers give their readers the impression that the whole world envies and admires their institutions, and is only waiting for the opportunity to follow their example. For years together the Russians were led to believe that Great Britain was on the eve of revolution and submitted to deductions from their scanty earnings to aid the cause in foreign parts on an assurance that the result was certain. This delusion alone has gone far to prevent sensible relations between Russia and her neighbours.

I am no unqualified admirer of the modern press in its free conditions. It has brought many of its troubles upon itself by its quarrelsomeness and its corruptions. But its suppression or annexation by authority is in the aggregate a much worse evil. We could in the former days balance one opinion against another and reach some conclusion. We had some guarantee that a Government or powerful individual could not suddenly sweep a whole people on some new course unsuspected by their neighbours. In persuading Lord Salisbury to conclude the Mediterranean Agreement of 1887, Bismarck assured him that neither Kaiser nor Chancellor had the power of compelling the German people to go to war unless they were convinced that the war was one of self-defence.

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Such an assurance would be meaningless if the people had no will but that of their dictators. We have all of us to rethink foreign policy in terms of the modern dictatorships.

## CHAPTER V

### THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT

#### I

OF all the economic experiments now being made in the world, the American is by far the most instructive and valuable to the foreign observer. The other countries, Russia, Italy, Germany, furnish us with literature in abundance setting out in symmetrical form what they are aiming at and what they profess to be doing. But the United States alone provides us with the one sure way of judging, i.e. the testimony of a free press and freely speaking critics upon its results. This country is for the time being a glass-hive which we are permitted to watch. The changes we perceive in it are so rapid and any next move is so unpredictable that to deal in detail with any particular phase would be a waste effort for my present purpose, but N.R.A. and the "new deal" policies raise certain general questions which are independent of details.

President Roosevelt is trying to do several things simultaneously. He is trying to put heart and courage into his countrymen who had fallen into a state of mental depression after their economic collapse ; he is trying to find remedies for the widespread abuses

in banking, finance and industry, which the depression had brought to light; and finally he is trying to discover the cure for unemployment and the way back to prosperity. All this he is endeavouring to do without any of the weapons which the dictators in other countries think indispensable. He cannot silence criticism, or dragoon or imprison his opponents. He can only within very narrow limits apply any kind of coercion. He has a free Parliament on his flank willing to stand by and hold its hand so long as he gives satisfaction, but very ready to chop in and reassert itself if he fails, or seems to fail. He regards his mission as temporary, and disclaims all intention of disturbing the existing order in its essential—the free scope for private enterprise. When the crisis is passed, he will retire from the scene; or if he is re-elected, become an ordinary President.

The courage and energy with which he has undertaken and is pursuing his task command universal respect, and have already gone far to achieve the first of his objects—the raising of the national temperature from the depths to which it had fallen in the two years before his election. That alone, if it can be sustained, may help enormously to the achievement of his other objects. But in these he is between two fires—Socialists who say that he cannot succeed unless he goes the whole length and prescribes the whole of their medicine, and producers and manufacturers who say that he is prescribing too much of it. Between the two he is aiming at what all free countries desire—the reconciliation of the control necessary in the public interest with individual private enterprise.

To understand the American conditions we must go back to the days before the slump. In those days the ruling economic theory was faith in the future. It was said only to be necessary to produce things and they would be absorbed in ever-increasing quantities and, through this absorption, enrich consumers, who would go from buying to buying. To plan, therefore, for a practically unlimited demand was the right way of industry, and if the consumer lacked ready money to buy the more expensive goods, he could be supplied with them through the payment by instalment system. The two ends of purchasing power and things to be purchased would thus always meet, and the problem of production and consumption be automatically solved.

It was almost treason to question these beliefs. "Prosperity Hoover" would admit no possible check to prosperity. When I visited America in 1928 at the top of the boom, I was told that the European idea of a "saturation point" in the consumer was as antiquated as the old wages fund theory. The picture presented to me was, as I described at the time, that of "a whole continent caught up in a whirl of producing and consuming; streams of cars pouring out on expectant motorists; houses, furniture, typewriters, fountain-pens, and all the other things made in the mass-producing way chasing multitudes who were only waiting to be caught; wants multiplying, factories spreading, machinery whirring." At the same time immense numbers were feverishly discounting the as-

sumed future, speculating on it, hoisting its values to dizzy heights, and turning them into cash for present use—to build more factories, to buy steam-yachts, and to have generally a good time.

An outsider who kept his eyes open observed one considerable breach in the theory. It ought, according to its own logic, to have worked of itself. But apparently it required an enormous effort in advertising. The creation of wants through advertising seemed in the end to be the greatest of American industries. Two million salesmen were at work selling goods which, according to the theory, should have sold themselves, “scientific salesmen” trained to the finest edge in all the arts of winning reluctant buyers. Artists, poets and writers pooled their resources in the advertisement columns of newspapers and magazines ; the streets blazed with the appeal to buy ; the highways and hedges took it up.

I was told that this was catching prosperity at the flood, but there seemed even then to be a note of anxiety in it, and a latent doubt whether an unlimited demand could be relied upon, if it were not supplemented and stimulated by this incessant effort. I came away with a feeling, which I recorded at the time, that either our methods and theories were all astray, or that something was going to happen in America.

3

What did happen illustrates the kind of catastrophe to which planned industry is liable, if the theory on which it is planned is wrong or defective. American industry was planned as no other, with the possible

exception of German, and when its theory of a practically unlimited demand for mass-produced articles broke down, it was faced with a greater catastrophe than that which faced the less-planned and technically less-efficient industry of Great Britain in its time of depression. Our two and three quarter millions of unemployed were disaster enough, but not comparable to that of the fourteen or fifteen millions who were thrown out of work when demand failed the great mass-producing factories of the United States. The greater variety of existing small businesses and our much greater aptitude for highly finished products here stood us in good stead, and under the strain we developed greater flexibility and resourcefulness than the American trained to his big industry. The American eggs were in a few big baskets ; ours in a larger number of small ones, small, that is, by the American standard.

But while American industry has thus in its catastrophe illustrated the dangers of planning, it presents a far simpler problem than ours to the State-planner. For it has of its own initiative completed most of the stages which would need to be undertaken as a preliminary to planning in Great Britain. The great American industries have either extinguished or brought under control the smaller units ; they have effected the division of labour and control of competition which they think essential to efficient and cheap production. The material is thus to a large extent sorted for the State-planner and his problem to that extent simplified. The question now is whether he can plan rightly where industry has planned wrongly



for itself. He is making at least an heroic attempt aided by the best brains in the country. America to-day presents the extraordinarily interesting spectacle—the first of its kind on anything like the same scale—of economic experts bringing their theories to bear on practical business with all the liabilities attaching to that process—liabilities which make it so much more exciting than writing books or lecturing to a class.

The result of this encounter between the men of theory and the men of fact is, so far as one can judge up to the present time, a drawn battle. The tragedy of deduction killed by fact has been repeated on many a stricken field from which the theorists have retired bruised and wounded, but not a few alleged facts have been demolished by the theorists. The process, as it looks to the outsider, is a perpetual opportunism in which things are tried, rejected, and other things tried in rapid succession, but this may well be no more than a wise recognition of the difficulty of the task and the hazard which attends all efforts to measure the consequences of action over so vast a field. In these respects the Roosevelt experiment has been in happy contrast with the arrogant dogmatism of the European dictators.

But as it goes forward it reveals what philosophers might call the antinomies of the economic life, factors and tendencies inevitable and unescapable but not to be reconciled by any process of reasoning. The pattern of the perfectly planned State is no doubt, as Plato says, laid up in heaven, but we see it only dimly through earthly eyes. It is a land in which, as another Greek philosopher puts it, “things are dear where one

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sells and cheap where one buys," where the value of money is so adjusted as to relieve debtors without hurting creditors, where manufacturers are assured high prices when they sell at home, and the benefits of a depreciated currency when they sell abroad, and where all these adjustments are so contrived that consumers have an abundance of everything and can continue to buy without exhausting their purchasing power. The American "brain-trusts," like their European advisers, Mr. Keynes and others, appear at any given moment to possess half these secrets and they pursue them with admirable tenacity until the other half begins to poke up. Then it appears that behind all the theories there are deep and sundering conflicts of interests, the sound of which had not penetrated to the professors' studies. The "managed currency" can be managed for the benefit of creditors or for the benefit of debtors, but not to the satisfaction of both at the same time. The "commodity dollar" can be worked perfectly if the politicians will keep their hands off it, and the official calculations on which it depends are accepted without question, but not if politicians act as they usually do or a doubting public begins prying into official figures. The tariff which suits farmers is simply not the tariff which suits manufacturers. And so on and so on.

Then there is the difficulty, which also the American experiment brings to light, that the material on which the experimenter is working changes from hour to hour under his hand. Things, as the Americans say, will not stay put. Shopkeepers raise their prices and check buying just when it seemed to have got under

way. The machine develops a new capacity for displacing labour, just when it was supposed that the five-hour day was going to bring a large number of unemployed back to work. Nature butts in with a bumper harvest and defeats all plans for reducing the yield of wheat. The European dictator has a short way with all these perversities. He decrees, his decrees are carried out, and if they are wrong, the people suffer, but are not permitted to say so. In America the planner must satisfy a multitude of claimants and complainants who will not be denied the free-born American right of hearing. This in fact is his main chance of success. He learns before too late where the shoe pinches, and being a wise man with no false pride, he turns and tacks and tries something else.

4

Let me try very tentatively to gather up a little of the experience which has accumulated in the first two years. The Washington planners started generally from the assumption that the depression was the result of excessive profits to industry—profits which being invested in plant expansion caused over-production and unemployment. The way to recovery was, therefore, to reduce profits, raise wages and thus restore purchasing power. Shorter hours at the same or higher wages would, it was hoped, absorb the unemployed and leave industry with a sufficient profit, while removing the temptation to over-production offered by excessive profits.

The theory was questioned from the beginning as

an over-simplification of the numerous and complicated causes which contribute to industrial depression and many omitted factors have been discovered as it has gone forward. A distinction needed to be made between the aggregate profit of industry which might be very large, and the margin of profit on which it was working, which might be very small. When asked to pay higher wages for shorter hours an industry paying high dividends might truthfully reply that, if it did so, its profits would disappear, unless it could sell its goods at a higher price. But in so far as it did this, it diminished purchasing power and checked recovery. Again the supreme planner might relieve the farmer of his debts by devaluating the dollar, but the devaluated dollar would in time raise the prices of things which the farmer and everyone else bought and so once more check recovery and bring him back to his starting point. There have been moments when N.R.A. and its "codes" seemed dreadfully to resemble the india-rubber ball with a hole in it which, when you have elaborately smoothed out one side presents you with a new depression on the other side.

Further, in endeavouring to curtail profits and reform the existing industrial system the President found himself in conflict with large numbers of those upon whose voluntary co-operation he relied to make a success of his recovery plan. Being beset with doubts as to what profits they would be permitted to make, what new taxes would be imposed on them, what would be the effect on the value of money of the great unbalanced Budgets which threatened or of the manipulations of the dollar by the "brain-

trusts," the industrialists held back and, as economists say, deflated when they were required and expected to "reflate." Eloquent words have been addressed to them, but both they and the banks which advanced them money wanted to know in precise terms where they would be, if working under the proposed codes they were involved in heavy losses, and though State-aid has been forthcoming, it could not go far without increasing the evils of the unbalanced Budget.

Then behind all was the conflict of two schools, one of which believed that the way of salvation was for the country to be self-contained, and the other that there could be no return to anything like the previous prosperity unless tariffs were lowered and foreign trade resumed. The first prevailed at the outset, and in order to keep his hands free for the manipulation of the dollar, according to his internal necessities, the President declined co-operation in currency reform with the World Economic Conference and thereby brought that Conference to an abrupt end. Later experience appears to be bringing the second school back into favour. If "insular Free Trade" has its drawbacks, continental isolation appears to be at least as difficult. At this point more conflicts and "antinomies" appear to be coming into sight.

Simultaneously an enormous effort has been necessary to deal with unemployment, and as the "community funds" provided by voluntary charity have become exhausted, more and more of it has fallen on the State. But improvisation by different States on different methods has proved extremely costly and wasteful, and the hope that the mere distribution of

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spending-power on relief or on something called "public works" would start spending on an inclined plane which would carry it forward by its own momentum has proved largely illusory. Widespread mismanagement and "graft" are alleged. Americans are now coming to the conclusion that there was much more to be said than they realized for the "demoralizing British dole," and opinion is ripening towards a systematic insurance of unemployment on the British model. But to start such a system in the depths of a depression is like insuring a house when it is on fire. Europe has little realized the intense suffering of the American unemployed, and it must be put to the credit of the planners that they have succeeded in improvising relief on the vast scale required.

### 5

There will probably be no point at which an experiment of this kind can be called finished, and a balance struck of loss and gain. The economic results of N.R.A. are likely for a generation to come to be in hot debate between American parties. But it is impossible to believe that the great inquest to which the American people have submitted themselves will not, in the fullest sense, be salutary to them and useful to the world. Never has the economic structure of a great community been so completely and dispassionately explored. As N.R.A. goes forward we see the abstractions called economic laws actually at work in the living body, and realize, perhaps for the first time, the extraordinary complication and sensitiveness of its nervous system. The responses and reactions cross

and re-cross one another, and in the end produce results which baffle the wisest. The human patient cannot be chloroformed and subjected to the major operations which might give him a new body or a new kind of nervous system ; he must go about his business all the time that the surgeons are operating on him. We begin to see the skill and knowledge which this kind of surgery demands and the limitations imposed on it by the nature of the subject.

We see also the entanglement of the ethical and the economic. The economic system displayed to us has grafted on to it practices which are un-social, predatory, inhuman. In many States it is without the mitigation of factory acts, sanitary legislation, limitations on child-labour which the much-maligned nineteenth century provided in Great Britain. It has limited Trade Unionism to an aristocracy of Labour. It has developed financial and speculative methods which impoverish the nation and give inordinate profits to the few. On all this the President has called the American people to judgment, and in a few months produced such stirrings of conscience and awareness of its own condition in the public mind as the professional moralists could scarcely have produced in a generation.

This is how a generous-minded man appeals to a free people. It would be well for us all if we could have periodically a similar stocktaking. I look forward to the time when every civilized Government will practise the Rooseveltian method without waiting for a national emergency.

# CHAPTER VI

## THE CONDITION OF GREAT BRITAIN

### I

**P**ASSING now to our own country, can we get any clear idea of its present condition, and the course on which it is going?

Looking back to my youth and comparing now and then—now even in these times of depression—I cannot at all doubt that the condition of the people has on the whole greatly improved. What is more, I believe this improvement is one of the causes of the present unrest. A better-educated and more self-respecting people is more aware of what is wrong, and rightly demands greater equality of status and a larger share of the available wealth. The old nineteenth-century complacency has gone. The twentieth does not take poverty for granted. Everything is relative, and we may according to our temperaments regard the same facts as less of evil or more of good, but that does not entitle us to blot out the good.

The nineteenth-century optimists wearied us with statistics proving that everything was for the best in the best of all possible worlds. I have in my possession books and pamphlets belonging to the seventies



and eighties showing by incontestable figures that the British working-class had advanced to a condition of well-being undreamt of in any other age—the same condition which later generations have treated as the nadir from which they are painfully ascending. We may positively hope that any condition that we can describe now in relatively favourable terms will in the same way be a nadir to the next generation. There is no rest-and-be-thankful in the social process.

With that caution let me try this relative appraisal. I have in my mind certain landmarks. The first Budget on which I wrote a leading article was Mr. Goschen's in 1887, a famous Budget in those times. In the previous year Lord Randolph Churchill had fled precipitately from the Exchequer in alarm at the spectre which he saw looking ahead of him of a "ninety-million Budget." Mr. Goschen performed the great feat, for which he was universally applauded, of bringing the national expenditure back to £87,000,000 and reducing the income-tax from sevenpence to sixpence. In 1934 we think ourselves fortunate if we can keep the national expenditure much below £800,000,000; we have added surtax and steep death-duties to income-tax, and the income-tax at the moment of writing stands at five shillings.

In 1909 the whole country was convulsed and the ancient constitution thrown into the melting-pot, when Mr. Lloyd George tried to raise £14,000,000 in extra taxation. In 1933 Mr. Neville Chamberlain gave away precisely that sum to relieve beer-drinkers, and appeared to regard it as an inconsiderable item in a Budget of £700,000,000.

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If we bear these simple figures in mind, we shall get some measure of the road which we have travelled in less than fifty years. It is safe to say that, if any of the pre-war Chancellors of the Exchequer, Gladstone, Harcourt, Hicks Beach, Goschen or even Mr. Lloyd George himself, had been shown a post-war Budget, he would have declared it to be totally and utterly impossible. He would have said that taxation on this scale would bankrupt industry and starve a multitude. He would have said, as all the financiers did say, in July, 1914, that a war requiring an expenditure of even a third or a half of the expenditure on the Great War would ruin the economic structure. That it could go hand in hand with a rising standard of life for the majority and no intolerable discomfort for the minority he would have held to be demonstrably impossible. Yet this is what has actually happened.

How has it happened? First, of course, a considerable part of the new taxation represents not a sacrifice, but a redistribution of wealth. If Peter is robbed to pay Paul, both Peter and Paul are still Englishmen and the money remains in the country. A large part of the 300 millions needed for the service of the National Debt goes back into the pockets from which it is taken; a large part of the money raised for unemployment insurance, old age pensions, sickness and accident insurance goes from the pockets of the richer English into the pockets of the poorer English, but represents spending power in the country.

I believe the transfer from rich to poor to have been entirely good. It has done something to redress

the inequalities of rich and poor ; it has tided the poor over a difficult period without grievous hardship. The country has, so far, been able to avoid the deep distress which followed the Napoleonic wars, and been saved from the social strife which is the usual accompaniment of such distress. The sacrifices required of the rich have on the whole been to their advantage. Apart from any question of social order, they have an enormous interest in maintaining the credit of the country, and for them, as for nearly all wealthy people in Europe since the war, it has been a choice between sacrificing a considerable part of their income in taxation, or seeing their capital dissolved in a debacle of credit and currency. The wealthy and well-to-do in Great Britain have generally had the good sense to choose the lesser evil, and to do so without overmuch grumbling.

2

Let us turn now to the workers, who are the great majority of the population. In spite of certain checks, their wages, nominal and real, had steadily risen in the thirty years before the war, and the various forms of insurance had substantially added to them. The history of wages during the war has still to be written, but in general it may be said that prices soared and wages rather more than kept pace with them. The worker thus came out of the war with substantial advantage compared with his pre-war condition, but the very serious question remained whether he could keep this advantage when prices fell.

The struggle, open or veiled, on this question has

been the principal underlying factor in the economic history of the country since the war. The great strikes of this period, coal strikes, transport strike, general strike, are all phases of the workers' resistance to the effort of employers to reduce wages in conformity with the fall of world prices. Employers complain that the "time-lag," as economists call it, between the fall of prices and the fall of wages, owing to the resistance of organized Labour, compels them to pay wages which are not earned by the proceeds of industry, and places them at a disadvantage with foreign competitors who pay lower wages. The story of these contending forces is a little obscured by special phases of it such as the premature return to the gold standard which precipitated the coal strike and the general strike, and the backwash of the American storm which swept us off gold in 1931, but in general it has been going on all the time.

Two principal results have followed from this struggle. First, it has accelerated the process of finding machine substitutes for labour and so increased what is called "technological unemployment"; second, it has landed the country in Protection, which is said to be necessary to protect the home manufacturer paying higher wages from the competition of the foreign manufacturer paying lower wages. The causes which contribute to the fixing of prices are so many and so complicated at the present time that it is difficult to disentangle the effects on them of Protection in any one country, but when world prices find their level and begin to rise, it will be seen that Protection has transferred back to the employer in prices some part of what

the worker had gained in real wages. Protection must have this result or it has no result. But so far the wage-struggle is still in favour of the worker, who has retained a substantial part and in some industries—transport, agriculture etc.—a very large part of what he gained during the war.

Against this he has to set unemployment. Poverty now is the result not so much of low wages as of the difficulty of finding and keeping jobs. Our way of measuring this evil is at once too black and not black enough. The monthly statistics present a picture of two and a quarter million people as “the unemployed,” and the public gets into its head that this number represents a class which is continuously unemployed. There are unhappily a large number who are in this condition, but the figure includes a large quantity of casual labour, for which insurance was deliberately provided, a large number more who are in and out of work, employed this week and unemployed next, and a considerable number of women and lads who did not come into the account in former days. At any given moment the immense majority of the workers are employed and the numbers of the continuously unemployed are comparatively few.

That is some consolation, but, if we draw too much from it, we miss some of the most serious evils of this condition. Unemployment at its present level spreads a sense of insecurity over an immensely greater number, and, apart from the deduction it makes from what other classes would call their annual income, creates anxieties and doubts which rank high among its “intellectual and moral damages.” It causes an

immense worry and unrest all over the field. It is also peculiarly and painfully concentrated in certain areas where the local industry is to all intents and purposes dead.

We may at least take some satisfaction in the thought that we are pioneers in the effort to lift this load of anxiety and insecurity off the working-class home. We stumble and grope and improvise as we go along. Our misfortune was that we only started our insurance when the house was on fire. If we had had ten years of normal industry after our scheme was started, we could in all probability have accumulated a fund which would have carried us through this emergency with none or little of the trouble in which we have actually been involved. All these controversies about whether we can afford two or three shillings a head for a child, about the means test, and the different authorities to fill gaps, are the ragged ends of an improvised system. Industry must afford whatever is necessary to provide a decent subsistence in a going scheme of insurance, and it should enlist the workers in its administration. All experience suggests that they will know better than anyone what "means test" to apply, and how to deal with malingerers and impostors. The trouble at present is that they are not so enlisted, and that all the difficult questions of administration become controversies between Labour trying to enforce something it calls Socialism and ratepayers and taxpayers resisting it. Still, we have blazed this trail.

To unemployment we must add housing as the other principal set-back which the workers have suffered since the war. This has compelled large numbers to live in conditions of discomfort and overcrowding who could well afford decent accommodation if it were available. Overcrowding rapidly makes new slums, and to that extent frustrates the effort to overtake the shortage of good houses. It would be unfair to say that Governments have shirked the problem, but the cost of building has made it extremely difficult to provide the houses most needed—those at low rents within the means of the workers and not absorbing an excessive part of their earnings. Neither State-building nor subsidies to private owners have solved this problem so far. Everyone admits that slums are a disgrace and that they ought to be abolished, but slum-clearance is found in practice to be a complicated problem of shifting and re-housing the slum-dwellers, replanning whole neighbourhoods, enlarging the circumferences as well as thinning out the centres of the towns and correspondingly improving transport. We are now on the way to a comprehensive handling of this question and what we have chiefly to regret is that so much time has been lost.

One other circumstance may be added here, which I think is of more importance than is generally realized ; that is the sense of confinement which is one of the new facts in the post-war world. A young man of pre-war times who chafed under the conditions in an old country could reach out to a new life in a

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new world—Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States—whereas the shutting of doors on migration throws the young men of these times back on themselves and compels them to concentrate on changing the political conditions in their own countries. This is one of the profounder causes of the post-war unrest. Yet if the whole world were open to his free choice, it is at least doubtful where a British workman could go with any certainty of improving his conditions. The workman who was prevented—unwisely as I think—from telling us over the wireless that he preferred the life of Soviet Russia to the life of Great Britain, would be very unwise to go there unless he had seriously made up his mind that he was willing to work at a lower wage as an “employed man” in Russia under the discipline and in the conditions of life imposed by the Russian Government than he would get as an unemployed man in Great Britain. There are, one needn’t doubt, some who would be compensated by the thought that the worker was on top in this new society, but they are not likely to be very many.

Such in general is the picture. There are many black spots in it—the peculiarly painful concentrated unemployment of the stricken areas, the lack of security in so many homes, the shortage of decent dwellings. Whoever wishes to take up his parable against society in general will find plenty of material. But to paint it all black is not the way of sense or truth. The great mass of the people are evidently better off than they were thirty or even twenty years ago. Family incomes have substantially increased, large numbers of the



unemployed are drawing amounts considerably higher than the wages of casual labour twenty years ago ; the agricultural labourer is in many parts of the country getting twice as much. A man of my age has only to keep his eyes open to see that the great majority of the workers (and their womenfolk and children) are better fed, better clothed, and have more to spend on sport and pleasure than ever before in his lifetime. I have now for twelve years had rather special opportunities of observing the women and children of the poorest class who come hop-picking in Kent, and cannot in the least doubt that their standard of life has steadily risen. I read a newspaper article the other day in which a young writer held up his hands in horror at the fact, which he said was established by investigation, that six million people were on the verge of hunger. It is of course a fact which no one can dream of palliating, but in 1904, a normal year of no special unemployment, Campbell-Bannerman told the country on the authority of Charles Booth, that twelve millions were on the "hunger line."

4

So in any account of these times in our own country a certain cheerfulness must creep in. It has done something which *a priori* one would have said it couldn't have done—wasted its substance in a colossal war, borne the staggering load of taxation that followed with comparative equanimity, sustained its credit, maintained its unemployed, and placed its standard of living on a higher level than before. More

than ever we are back at the question—how has it done it?

The early observers said it was living on its capital which, they predicted, would be exhausted in a very short time. But this plainly wouldn't do. Savings were on a higher level than before the war; banks were cluttered with money waiting for investment; large sums were still being lent abroad. No community could live for more than the shortest time on its capital, for, however it is financed, vastly the greater part of what it consumes is and must be produced from day to day or week to week.

The secret, no doubt, is the comparatively simple one that the country is producing more than it produced before.

Here the much-maligned machine came to our rescue. The Great War was unlike all other wars in that the demand for munitions led in four and a half years to an increase of steam power and electric power, and therefore of a capacity for production which in normal times would probably have been spread over twenty years. It to that extent provided the means of curing its own wounds. The post-war world found itself with a power of production beyond the wildest dreams of the pre-war world. Wise use of the new machine of supply without the corresponding development of demand, which normally would have kept pace with it, was extraordinarily difficult, and led to a great many wild rushes down blind alleys, creating panics of over-production in some directions, while in others there was under-production. I think it may be claimed for Great Britain that on the whole she

made a wiser use of the new power than most of her neighbours.

She faced her unemployment problem and made no secret of it. By publishing the figures of her unemployed she seemed to be broadcasting her distress to the world, and her neighbours inferred that she was in full decline. That was of no importance compared with the part which these figures played in keeping herself informed and her people in sober mood. When I visited some of the principal industrial centres in the United States at the top of its boom in 1928, I came away with the impression that, population for population, the unemployed were in about the same proportion in both countries. But the American people seemed to know nothing about their unemployed and were serenely confident in their theory of an unlimited demand waiting for an unlimited supply. They were supplying Europe with a large part of what it wanted to make good the devastation of war, and financing this process with lavish loans ; and they seemed to think that this process could go on for ever. The Englishman kept saying that he was in a state of deep depression, but his men of business, aided by exceptionally gifted and skilful workers, were building up a great many new businesses, and putting much quiet thought into them. When they prospered they said nothing ; when they failed they groaned heavily and audibly but tried again. The foreign world heard the groans, but knew next to nothing about this quiet persistent effort. A German who had lived in the country before the war and had just visited it again on a business

tour told me in 1926, one of our blackest years, that there was nowhere in Europe anything approaching the prosperity that he had seen in large parts of England. He added that we were great humbugs.

Our problems are not solved. Until we recover our shipping and foreign trade we cannot hope for anything like the prosperity that our productive capacity should win for us.<sup>1</sup> It was perhaps too much to ask of human nature that we should remain the sole Free Trade country—the “dumping-ground of the world,” as Protectionists declared it to be—when all other countries were piling up tariffs and adding to tariffs the subsidies to foreign trade of depreciated currencies. But it is a question whether on balance we have gained more than short-term advantages in the effort to balance tariffs with tariffs, and quotas with quotas, and it is certain that Free Trade is still the interest of the export and shipping trades. The new policy will be judged hereafter by its success or failure in clearing the obstructions to these great trades, and bringing the world back to a saner frame of mind about tariffs. That is the hope held out by the advocates of this policy, and it can only be tested by time.

5

Surveying the whole scene, may one not plead for a little more good-humour and charity than has recently been the fashion in our politics? Reading

<sup>1</sup> The common talk of recovering “pre-war prosperity” is nonsense. To go back to pre-war conditions would for the great majority of people in Great Britain be a heavy set-back,

or listening to the denunciations of "the rich" by the spokesmen of the poor, one feels them to be exactly the same in kind as the diatribes against the working man which rise from club arm-chairs. Henry Smith, the famous mathematician, said that an undergraduate's idea of a working man was a hasty generalization from his scout (college servant), and the left-wing orator as often as not is generalizing from the picture-pages of popular newspapers which specialize in the antics of millionaires and their womenfolk. The real world—the world in which 90 per cent. of all classes live—bears no resemblance to any of these fancy pictures. Rich and poor are not divided as is supposed; there are infinite gradations of both. The black-coated worker suffers the same anxieties about his job and his salary, and has the same sense of being at the mercy of his employer, as the worker in the factory. Doctors, lawyers and clergy skimp and save, lie awake at night wondering what will become of their children if they fall ill or die early; calamity befalls rich people, and plunges them from the heights to the depths. Rich men expose themselves to stinging retorts when they preach the doctrine of "compensations" to the poor, but we need not go to the other extreme and suppose that all the ills of human life are a monopoly of manual workers.

The process which has brought the sixpenny income-tax of 1887 to the five-shillings (rising with surtax to a maximum of thirteen shillings with corresponding death-duties) of 1934, represents a great redistribution of wealth, the results of which have on the whole been good. We have seen in these years how an

individualistic society may carry a considerable part of Socialism on its back. But it would be unfair not to realize that this process has meant a painful dislocation of the time-honoured life for a great many. All over the country estates have been broken up, houses in which the same families have lived for centuries abandoned, and a thousand old memories and loyalties left behind. To paint this in falsely sentimental colours is one thing, but not to acknowledge that it inflicts wounds and tearings at the heart-strings beyond measurement in money is stupidity and lack of imagination. Not to perceive that it leaves a gap in country life which the successors of these people have so far been slow to fill is to miss a large part of the modern land problem. A certain fellow-feeling in these respects is necessary to good politics ; it makes the sacrifices that must be made by the rich and well-to-do easier, and carries us along the path of least resistance. I believe that there is much more of it among the ordinary decent English than some politicians at all realize.

Taking it by and large, I find it difficult to share either the pessimism which afflicts so many of my contemporaries or the anger which it inspires in some honest idealists. I see in it much of which an Englishman may reasonably be proud—an enormous effort which the previous generation would have thought impossible—made in a characteristically stubborn and quiet way, disappointments faced with good courage, dangers avoided into which other nations have fallen. I see an alert and spirited younger generation with its conscience awake to the evils of poverty and unem-

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ployment, and determined that governments shall not go to sleep about them. I see a general willingness to try new things, if also to test our steps as we go. England may not be merrie, but there does to the outward vision seem to be a great deal of jollity, high spirits and mutual good-humour in spite of everything. Evil as the times may be, we do not bear the marks of an unhappy people.

Indeed, whatever test we take, whether wage levels, standard of living, public finance, volume of trade, general well-being, there is nothing in the condition of the countries that have sacrificed their freedom which makes it even plausible to suggest that we should gain by following their example. Prosperity is always a relative term, but by any of these tests Great Britain is beyond doubt at the present time the most prosperous country in the world.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE WAYS OF SALVATION

#### I

**L**ET me now shift the scene a little and consider some of the many voices which are proclaiming the ways of salvation.

I read some modern economists with a growing inability to understand what they are driving at. In their use of jargon, their sophistication of simple things, their endeavours to reduce the obvious to the mysterious, they are surpassed only by metaphysicians and psychologists. The fact that two and two make four reappears in their manuals as an algebraic formula liberally adorned with square roots, which requires a strenuous effort to disengage the original proposition. They are perpetually referring you to So-and-so's "law," and take for granted that both the name and the thing are familiar to you. I learn, for example, that "Bunther's law" requires a certain conclusion, and am put to enormous trouble to discover what this new generalization may be. I find ultimately that Bunther's law enables me to measure the demand for rocking-horses. It is a function of two variables, the child's desire for the rocking-horse and the parent's capacity to buy it.



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Socialist economists are even more exasperating in these respects than those who follow the classical tradition. They have it ineradicably in their minds that everything must be a "system" and have the apparatus of a system. They talk habitually of the "capitalist system" and the "price mechanism," and thereby produce in the minds of their readers a vision of wicked men devising means of oppressing their fellow-creatures, and inventing a mechanism for this nefarious purpose. Let us boldly say that there are no such things, and that the beginning of all useful argument, whatever views we may hold, is a flat denial that most of these terms have the meaning assigned to them or implied in them.

What is called "the capitalist system" is the gradual development spread over centuries, even thousands of years, of certain methods, springing from human characteristics and necessities, of working, acquiring, hoarding, bartering, providing for self, and by an extension of self for the family which survives self. Its history is the history of the human race. It has reflected at all stages human virtues and infirmities, courage, skill, endurance, altruism, selfishness, greed, cunning, cruelty. In the age of steam and electricity it has taken on new and complicated forms which are extremely difficult to analyse, but which have brought both the virtues and the defects of an acquisitive society into high relief. The general result has been greatly to improve the standard of life and increase the conveniences and amenities available to all, but at the same time to create specially wealthy classes whose position and behaviour have aggravated the sense of inequality and

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injustice in the mass of men and women. At the same time, the passing on of property from one generation to another obliterates the memory of its origin, and produces the impression that rewards and penalties have no relation to justice, and that we are living in a world in which the distribution of good things is either the sport of a malevolent chance or the arbitrary decree of a few rich and powerful persons.

Though the cry of the poor has been heard in all ages, it has until quite recently been taken for granted that poverty was one of the inevitable human conditions, and that it fell to each of us individually to get over it or round it, or make the best of it. The self-consciousness which recognizes it as a curable evil is of comparatively recent growth, and may well be held hereafter to have been the most beneficent of all the changes of thought in the nineteenth century. Nothing is more desirable than that we should keep a constant stream of criticism playing upon ourselves and the Society in which we live.

But let us remember that it is ourselves that, in the broadest sense, we are criticizing, and not suppose that we are innocents arraigning criminals in a conspiracy to oppress us, or that if we depose one set of men and put another in their place, they will be free from the infirmities and cupidities which plague us now. The root fact is that there is nothing which can properly be called a system in a large part of human affairs, and the question before us is not that of the evils attending this lack of system—which are admitted—but whether or how far they can be mended by conscious effort.

Any existing order can be overthrown in an excess of passion and bitterness, but that, as we are learning, carries us a very little way towards a new order. The old idea that the rich can be dispossessed, and their possessions divided among the poor proves to be largely a delusion in the modern world. The rich can be destroyed, and their land can be confiscated, and their houses, clothes, jewels, etc., appropriated, but they cannot be robbed of their "money," for the simple reason that it perishes with them. It ceases to have "value" when the methods of credit by which it has been accumulated are abolished. This is the dilemma of all revolutionaries. They cannot convert the old society into the new by taking on its assets and its personnel. Its assets will have vanished, and its personnel in all probability have been hanged, shot, or driven into exile as the result of their success. They have accordingly to begin all over again from the beginning, and having no plan, but only an abundance of untried theories, they start out on a series of improvisations and experiments upon the suffering body of their people.

This is the extreme instance exemplified in Soviet Russia, and academic Communists who visit that country and have the advantage of returning to the comfortable homes and settled conditions of a capitalist society grow lyrical over the profound sociological and economic interest of its experiments. In the minds of some of these observers it seems positively to add to their interest that the victims are numbered by the

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million, and that the experiments are on the vast scale which requires this sacrifice. The Marxian economist who regards mankind as his raw material develops a cool aloofness to what other people call humanity, which is scarcely equalled by that of the Oriental despot who holds the same view. May we not say that it is still a mark of civilization to question the right of any man or group of men, however much they may be convinced of their own rectitude and benevolence, to treat their fellow-beings in this way? That those who have followed this road can wish for other countries, as apparently they do, to pass through the same furnace of affliction in the transition from worse to a better state, might well seem incredible, if there were not so many other instances of the inhumanity of the political theorist.

We are asked to enter into the mind of Soviet Russia, and understand its workings. By all means let us try to do so, but unless we begin by recognizing its profound inhumanity, we degrade our own standards. The *schwärmerei* of the "advanced" intellectuals for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat is one of the strangest manifestations of these times, and has fatally compromised them in their denunciations of Nazism and Fascism. Nothing has been more subtly demoralizing to Liberal thought.

### 3

I am conscious of a strong objection to making the submissions required of their subjects by both Fascists and Soviet Governments—submissions which seem to me incompatible with self-respect—but, not of any

other bias against State action, if there is a reasonable chance of its success. The assumption that certain men working collectively as a State will be free from the infirmities of greed, corruption, and oppression, which are imputed to men working individually, does indeed seem a little naïve in view of what in past times Governments have done to their subjects, and what they are even now doing to one another ; nevertheless the advantages of State machinery, wisely used, and controlled by a free and healthy public opinion, are everywhere in evidence. But when the State ventures on new ground certain things have to be borne in mind. First and foremost its mistakes, when it makes mistakes, are on a far larger scale, and their consequences far more serious, and much more difficult to retrieve than the mistakes of individuals. It has therefore usually stayed its hand, until individuals have broken the new ground and learnt or bought the experience which alone justifies large-scale enterprise.

Socialism on the scale now proposed to us—i.e. the abolition of private profit and the substitution of public ownership and control for private ownership and control—is putting all our eggs into one basket, and before we do that we have a duty to make sure, as far as is humanly possible, that those who propose to carry the basket are competent to do so. Otherwise we risk disaster, which would be many degrees worse than the spills and breakages which undoubtedly occur when many baskets are carried by many individuals. Laying their stress upon these spills and breakages, theoretical Socialists take for granted that the change they propose must be for the better, yet it is

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a supposition about which the most serious misgivings are justified by experience up to the present time. So far as it is built upon the failures of Capitalism, the case for Socialism is really a paradox. It does not follow that because individuals working on a small scale with the incentive of private profit have failed the State working on a large scale without this incentive will succeed. The presumption is rather the other way. Except in a very limited field mere enlargement of the scale does not solve the problem, but rather increases its difficulties.

I suppose there has never been such all-round anxious scrutiny of the economic structure of the nations and of the reasons of its failings and shortcomings as in the years since the war, but the result has so far been to reveal a chaos of opinion not merely among laymen but among experts. There is an approach to an agreement that all the Governments are acting suicidally in their efforts to organize scarcity by quotas and tariffs—an agreement which, so far as it goes, seems scarcely to encourage optimism about the wisdom of the Governments. But apart from this no two experts appear to agree about anything. During the crisis of 1931, one group of experts told us one week that to go off the gold standard would be a disaster of the first magnitude, and another group of experts told us the next week that it was a blessing in disguise. One group attributes the greater part of the present trouble to monetary causes, but when we think we begin to see daylight, we find that almost every member of this group has a different idea about the cure. Follows on its heels another group which says that

monetary causes are only a minor factor, and that the real thing is the "trade cycle," about which no one knows anything. Mr. Roosevelt, most courageous and disinterested of men, doing his country an immense service if only by his personality and character, finds that he has perpetually to supplant one "brain trust" by another, since the advice which each gives him turns out to have largely the opposite results of what he or they intended. In sum, it appears that the knowledge of our own actions and their consequences in the economic sphere is still in its infancy, and that the attempt to generalize it in action leads to the most disconcerting and unexpected results.

4

We get along somehow when individuals are feeling their way through this jungle, stumbling and picking themselves up, losing money in one effort and making it in another. Our eggs are not in one basket, and we save a fair average. But it is an altogether different matter when the State takes to planning on a large scale, proposes to put all our money in its one basket, and to control it and distribute it for our greater good. In that case it must have clear and undisputed ideas of economic action and its consequences, or it will involve us all in disaster. It is surely not an exaggeration to say that in the present state of knowledge there are no clear or undisputed ideas in the possession of any set of men which could be applied over the whole field of industry or of banking, credit and finance with even relative safety. All the operations of this world are risks which are rendered relatively safe by

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the fact that they are different risks taken by a multitude of different individuals.

The first requisite then of the national planner is a foundation of accurate knowledge which will enable him to foresee the results of his action, for if he fails in this, he will do mischief in proportion to the scale of his plan. So far, it seems to have been the fate of most planners to have started without this knowledge, or to have overlooked some factor which takes them completely by surprise. But being committed, the official planner considers himself bound to go on, imposing plan upon plan, promising success after five years and five years—to-morrow and to-morrow—and if he is armed with the power of stifling criticism and suppressing discontent he may continue indefinitely at whatever cost to the subjects of his experiments.

As an example on a small scale we may take the operations of our own Minister of Agriculture, which have so far been attended with results very nearly the opposite of what he presumably intended or expected. But being committed he is bound to go on, and seems rapidly to be falling into the characteristic mood of the planner, and to say that if his plans do not suit agriculture, agriculture shall suit his plans. We can survive these experiments, but not too many of them. Nothing is more desirable than that the British iron and steel trade should be organized in a manner which makes it efficient, according to modern standards, and these heavy industries are of the type in which a measure of State aid may well be desirable and necessary to overcome the obstruction of minorities, but I own to a certain sympathy with iron and steel manufacturers



who want to be quite certain that State planning may not lead to the same results in their industry as in agriculture.

5

I have just been reading an article by a Socialist writer who revels in the thought that Governments, having committed themselves to what is called "planning," must go on *jusqu' au bout*, to the complete Socialist State, and he tells me how he would proceed. He would begin by appointing a committee to answer eighteen questions, and upon the "secure foundation" thus provided he would proceed to build. They are nearly all questions which no human being could answer, and some of them questions which the living generation has not the data for even the beginning of an answer. The "secure foundation" provided by the committee would in fact be a series of guesses about the future discoveries of science, the "reactions" of human nature to one kind of treatment or another, the development of human tastes and habits in one direction or another, the probability of one kind of demand or another—things which may be revealed unto babes, but are certainly hidden from the wise and prudent. Though, after the manner of his tribe, this writer appoints a committee to answer his questions, it is quite evident that he thinks he *knows* the answer to them all, and he has apparently not the slightest doubt about the stability of the structure which he would raise upon this "secure foundation." The literature of Socialism is full of these extravagances.

Great as may be the other obstacles—vested interests,

conservatism, selfishness—to the substitution of the State for the individual in the business of producing and distributing, the greatest of all is ignorance. No human being or group of human beings possesses the knowledge necessary to the rebuilding of a nation on a new plan. If we could imagine a state of society in which the demand of all its members could be measured from day to day, in which tastes and fashions were so standardized that they seldom changed, from which all the subconscious movements that are now so baffling to economists and politicians and private traders were ruled out, and which finally had either no dealings with its neighbours or only with those of the same type ; it would provide perfect material for the State planner. But such a society would be as nearly as possible dead. The living, moving stream of human-kind with its unceasing creative evolution offers a perpetual resistance to efforts to dam it and divert it, and those who succeed may find after a generation that they have created a backwater which the main stream has long left behind. Looking at the changes in our own lifetime, it is difficult not to feel a certain irritation at the boundless self-confidence with which the politicians and theorists of the hour announce their solutions of modern problems. There is no material less appropriate for handling by dogmatists and infallibilists than that which they have to handle. Its nature is obscure, its behaviour uncertain and unpredictable beyond a limited range. This does not justify fatalism or pessimism, but it does require that those who attempt to fashion it should treat it with respect and recognize their own limitations.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WAYS OF SALVATION

*(Continued)*

#### I

I LISTENED on the wireless the other night while a Labour leader arraigned the capitalist system and painted a lurid picture of starvation in the midst of plenty—the tragi-comedy, as he called it, of modern civilization. My sympathies are with anybody who uses any sort of argument which will awaken us to the evils and inequalities of the modern world, but as a description of the actual facts this picture is greatly exaggerated. Owing largely to the collective folly which blocks distribution by quotas and tariffs and disorganizes currencies by so doing—all of it State action by States—industry has produced unsaleable local surpluses, things in quantity beyond consumption by the home population and deliberately excluded by foreign countries. But these are an infinitesimally small amount compared with the vast consumption of the world, and if they were all let loose at the same time, and evenly divided, they would make a scarcely appreciable addition to our well-being. The world is not overflowing with things which are running to

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waste, it is actually far short of a large number of the things that would be necessary to bring its standard of living anywhere near the level which the Labour speaker and all of us desire.

We get nearer a serious meaning, if we say that modern industry has a capacity for production which, if wisely used, might increase wealth and diminish the daily toil of men and women. That is happily the truth—a truth not discreditable to the existing order—and in it lies our best hope of advancing civilization. But here too we need to beware of rhetorical statements. The capacity of machines for raising the standard of life over any wide area is probably much exaggerated; something more is needed for that purpose than a plethora of mass-produced articles. But if we put this capacity at its highest, the distribution of the product would still raise moral and psychological problems beyond the range of any economic doctrine. Suppose, to take an extreme instance, the product were sufficient at any given moment to provide all the citizens of a country with a “social credit” enabling them to live, as the phrase goes, without the necessity of earning their livelihood, and suppose that any considerable number of them took advantage of it to live this life of ease, the machinery would run down and the community rapidly become bankrupt. A community sustains its life not on accumulated wealth but on perishable goods produced month by month, week by week, and day by day, and any cessation of activity in producing these would bring it rapidly to a standstill. Whatever the capacity of the machine, the problem of maintaining the incentive to work

would still remain, and there is no mechanical solution to it. Conceivably it might be solved by the summary ways of disciplining the workers employed by both the Communist and the Fascist States, but in the free States it will be in the main a moral and educational problem, the problem in short of raising public opinion to the level at which voluntary idleness in any class will be branded as unsocial, however much the minimum standard guaranteed by the State may rise.

In any case it is almost certainly an illusion to suppose that there is any simple answer to the questions raised by the new forms of industry. To apply any one formula—whether individualist, socialist or monetary—to so vast and varied a field as the supply of human wants is to evade the trouble of thinking. There is no necessity to approach the problem in this way. The presumption is that parts of it will be suited to one method and parts to another. There is further a presumption that the difficulties to be overcome will be very much what they are now, whatever the system.

I have read scores of indictments of the capitalist order by Socialists and find a large part of them to be true. It does get itself into periodical impasses whether from an over-expansion of credit or other causes ; it does in its pursuit of an uncertain demand waste and lose a great deal of money as well as make profit ; it does in the course of its experiments go down blind alleys, invest capital and create machines for which at the moment there is no use or no sufficient use, and in retracing its steps causes a great deal of unemployment, suffering and misery ; it does tend to

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a very unequal system of rewards ; it is apt in its present phase to lead to wasteful competition. Most of this is true and deplorable. But then comes a great gap in the argument. It is apparently assumed as a self-evident truth that all these evils and all the failures which attend the process of trial and error in present circumstances will be avoided if the business of conducting industry is transferred from men acting as individuals or groups on the incentive of profit to men acting as the State without that incentive. It may be true, but nothing is less self-evident or less warranted by any knowledge or experience that we have so far. States in their dealings with one another appear to develop all the vices of individuals ; and in their dealings with their subjects they have practised cruelty and injustice in a manner to which all history bears witness.

### 2

When one thinks of the reality—the vast fermenting mass of human desire and endeavour comprised in the drab phrase “supply and demand”—and then turns to the systems in which it is proposed to confine it, one feels more than anything else the arrogance of them. The apparatus of these systems is richly laid out in the literature of Socialism. In it one may find schemes for all industries, each in its group, and all the groups correlated, co-ordinated, and subordinated to a planning group which is in a final and nebulous relation to the supreme hierarchy. Within each group are committees and sub-committees, commissioners and sub-commissioners, each with his own corps of

inspectors. In its early days the Soviet Government issued diagrams to show the beauty and perfection of its organization. With their whorls and concentric circles and radiating lines they had an uncanny resemblance to the drawings that come out of lunatic asylums. It made one giddy to look at them.

But when one comes to close quarters with this correlated, co-ordinated, perfectly articulated bureaucracy and asks how it will deal with this or that snag of the capitalist order, the answer is generally that it will refer it to a committee which will decide it in accordance with the principles of Socialism. Or we are told simply and without proof that under Socialism there will be no snag. It is very difficult to take this literature seriously. If we could imagine Great Britain passing by a peaceful revolution under a regime of this type and its getting established beyond challenge, I should expect something of this kind to happen. There would for the first period be a great burst of activity, in which the impracticability of a great many things that seemed so simple on paper would be discovered, and then we should settle down to a long period of tight administration in which reactionaries would come on top and try to change the Socialist State into the Fascist or "Co-operative" State. The administration by this time would have had to take all sorts of disciplinary measures for the suppression of criticism and free speech, and a good many critics and opponents of all schools would be living in the Outer Hebrides. Then we should start all over again in the old way, with our Pymys and Hampdens, and Burkes and Mills, agitating for liberty

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and free institutions and a free industry, and the Liberal counter-revolution would once more take its place as the cause of advanced "left-wing" thinkers. In the meantime industry, in the countries in which it was permitted to work in a free atmosphere, would have taken on new forms which would have rendered most of the plans of the perfectly planned State obsolete.

### 3

We can in a way test it by imagining what would have happened if Great Britain had been planned by a Socialist State in the manner proposed, say, about the middle of the last century when steam-power, as then developed, was supposed to be the last word in motive power, and horses in road-transport. The whole of the national capital world then would have invested on that hypothesis, and the developments of electricity and of the internal combustion engine would have threatened us if not with ruin at least with very painful losses and dislocations. They have in fact inflicted these on an immense number of private capitalists and manufacturers who have resisted them so far as they could, but been powerless against more enterprising competitors. The planned State would no doubt by degrees have taken on new methods, but can anyone believe that, with its capital embarked on the old and its power of restraining competitors, it would have broken the new ground with anything approaching the energy, inventiveness and enterprise that have characterized the subsequent years, or have succeeded to the same extent in raising the general level of pros-



perity? Russia, committed to a particular phase, which may be a passing on, of modern industry, raises the same question.

These considerations may help us to see the limitations of State planning, limitations recognized by every prudent man in his own business. There are some things in which the State must plan and take all the risks because without the discipline which the State alone can supply, an essential object cannot be achieved. The postal service and a large number of the health services are types of these. There is further a debatable ground on which it can reasonably be argued that State services are more efficient than private services, or that the revenue to be earned can usefully and rightfully be appropriated by the State. This is in general ground on which the material is fairly static, and the future can be foreseen with reasonable certainty. But beyond this is ground on which everything is uncertain, and the longer and more seemingly perfect the plan, the more likely it is not merely to go wrong but to quench the spirit of free adventure which finds the right road by trial and error. That the State should keep off this ground until at least it is reclaimed, and that it is *pro tanto* a disaster, when it is compelled by some pressing emergency—war or revolutionary outbreak—to occupy it, is the general conclusion which fact and experience suggest to us.

I am not suggesting that any principle can settle a particular question. The ground shifts, the conditions change ; as we go forward, the uncertain territory is reclaimed, or becomes sufficiently certain to justify

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planning on the large scale. In each case it is a question of degree and judgment of details. My personal disposition is to believe, and indeed to hope, that there will never be any time when the debatable land will be so shrunk as to deprive the adventurer of his job, for, if it did, we should be ripe for a new ice age, but I can see great advantages in reclaiming and bringing under orderly cultivation such parts of it as have been thoroughly explored. The gist of the matter is that we are under a delusion if we suppose that any one formula, such, for instance, as "public ownership and control," can be applied to the whole of this vast and varied territory.

In all this argument I find myself a pure pragmatist. I have no prejudice against State action as such, none of the feeling of the strict individualist of former days that man is in conflict with the State. But I have a strong prejudice against anyone who applies untested formulas to anything so various as the human condition. If there is reasonable proof that the State will conduct any particular activity better than individuals, then let the State do it, but do not let us argue this quite practical question in terms of generalities and abstractions. The vice of revolutions is precisely that they sweep away all argument in detail and bring on the scene a phantom army of isms and theories which can tell us nothing about the actual problems of government. The revolutionary scorns the advance from a particular experience to a wider experience; he starts with a head full of theories and formulas and proceeds to discover whether they will work by experiments on his fellow-beings. The intuitions of

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the great men of science have undoubtedly carried the world forward in this way, but it is not a suitable method for human beings. The bacteriologist may kill his bacteria by the thousand millions in the process of discovering whether his theory works, and we may cheerfully hope that they rather like it ; but when the biologist practises on dogs we become uneasy, and when the political theorist practises on human beings we ought at least to keep him under control. Russia and a large part of Europe to-day have become human laboratories in which vivisection is being practised on an immense scale.

As applied to human beings, the method is not scientific or likely to yield fruitful results. The political theorist has none of the humility of the scientific truth-seeker ; he does not change about and try something else with the cheerful readiness to admit himself wrong which is the beginning of scientific wisdom ; he is generally possessed with his theory, determined to prove it right, when it is manifestly wrong and false, willing to go all lengths at all costs to compel its acceptance in the teeth of facts. Necessarily for his purpose he requires tyranny. Democracy, liberty, Parliaments, a free press, free criticism, are so many obstacles in his path. In the free countries we can at least keep our theorists under control, if or when they come into office, but give them supreme power and they become the bullies, persecutors and tyrants whom we now see at large in the world.

Not to let our theorists loose, unless we are quite sure we can keep them under control, is, therefore, for the rest of us the way of self-preservation. Their dis-

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claimers should never be accepted. They may be quite honest in protesting that they love liberty and democracy, but if their programme requires arbitrary power, they will seize it, proclaim an emergency which is said to require it for a time, but which will be prolonged indefinitely on the plea that more time is required. All emergency Governments act more or less in this way ; all seek to prolong their power after the emergency is passed and would prolong it indefinitely if they could. But there are certain policies and programmes which commit those who embark on them so deeply and irretrievably, and from which retreat is so difficult, that they must either go on to the end or perish in what is called a counter-revolution. The moral for the rest of us is to beware of all policies that are irretrievable.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE EUROPEAN SCENE

#### I

FOR the writer of a book to speak in detail about the shifting scene of international affairs is to court disaster, but he may try to see the general drift of events in their relation to the past.

It is a good plan in thinking of the new Europe to keep one's eye on the time-table of the old Europe. There is a possible, though one may hope avoidable, deadly parallel between the old and the new. Germany after the defeat of France in 1871 was in a state of alarm. France after the defeat of Germany in 1918 was in a state of alarm. Bismarck and Moltke believed that the only way to prevent a French *revanche* was to surround France with a ring of Powers pledged to act with Germany in keeping the peace ; Clemenceau and Foch believed that to surround Germany with a similar ring was the only way to prevent a German *revanche*. The Frenchmen bettered the example set them by the Germans by disarming their former enemy and exacting indemnities on a scale which, if they could have been recovered, would have been ruinous to his economic life, but other circumstances are as nearly identical as historical parallels permit. France

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in 1871 was the wealthier and more populous country and likely by all the signs to keep the lead over Germany ; Germany in 1918 was far the more populous and likely to increase her advantage in wealth and man-power as time went on.

It took twenty years to wreck the original German idea—the idea of a France cut off from allies and hemmed in by a group of monarchical Powers working together for the German “security” which required that France should be kept down. If anyone could have made such a policy succeed it was Bismarck. No man ever brought to a single purpose greater virtuosity in statecraft or a more complete concentration of will and thought than he in these years. But the partners in his Three Emperors’ League would not play the parts that he assigned to them. They would not concentrate upon German security. While he was thinking of the “peril in the West,” they were thinking of their interests and ambitions in the East, interests and ambitions which more and more clashed. It was Bismarck’s complaint that the Emperors of Austria and Russia could not be left together for five minutes without quarrelling about matters which were not worth the bones of one Pomeranian. Worse still, when they quarrelled, each of them looked to him for support against the other, and claimed his “casting vote,” which could not be given to the one without offending the other.

For nearly twenty years he played, or tried to play, the part of “honest broker,” which meant in practice that he duped both his partners. In the end he gave his casting vote to Austria and endeavoured to console

Russia by a secret treaty with her behind the back of Austria. But for three years before he quitted the scene, the Tsar of Russia had become convinced that he was being tricked and that the pursuit of German security in the manner originally proposed would require his submission to a German hegemony in Europe. On Bismarck's departure the whole Bismarckian structure collapsed. Stifling his objections to the republican institutions of France, the Tsar accepted the overtures of the French Government and concluded the Franco-Russian Alliance, the deliberate object of which was to re-establish the balance of power in Europe. The first Franco-Russian agreement of 1891 was almost exactly twenty years after the end of the Franco-German war, and two years later, when the complete Alliance was concluded, Europe was divided into the two camps which came to their clash in the Great War.

We are now fifteen years from the Treaty of Versailles and, *mutatis mutandis*, we are perilously near the repetition of this history. Germany is in revolt, as France was, against the policy which would keep her down ; the attempt to disarm her is failing, the colossal reparations are written off. The effort to suppress her has produced more convulsive consequences in Germany than formerly in France—consequences which greatly complicate the original problem. Germany after a short trial has broken away from the League of Nations and is hatching a policy of her own which is as yet quite inchoate, but seems to be highly nationalistic and patriotic. The situation fifteen years after the

Treaty of Versailles looks rather worse than it did seventeen years after the Treaty of Frankfurt.

## 2

But there are differences and fortunately very important ones. Germany looking out for an ally has no obvious direction in which to look. Russia, the obvious recourse of France in the previous period, is not to be thought of at present. German institutions are a direct challenge to Communist Russia and have been adopted, according to the German account of them, to avert the Russian Communist peril. This may not be the end of the story, but it is likely to serve for as long a time as we can look ahead. Fascism has a certain sympathy with Nazism, but German designs upon Austria make it highly improbable that Italy can be a party to any aggressive German movement. The Little Entente, if it holds together and acts together, is the equivalent of a considerable Power, but any attempt to make it an ally of Germany would certainly break it up and reveal a wide divergence of internal interests. The overtures recently made by Germany to Poland have suggested to some ingenious writers that these two countries have in view a joint advance into Russia, if Japan should attack the latter, and they have seen the nightmare of a general war in which France would seize the same occasion to attack Germany and Great Britain be compelled to join in. This thought is not to be discouraged, in so far as it keeps us reminded that almost any war starting anywhere may have incalculable results, but on the assumption that Poles and Germans are in some degree



sane people, the more probable interpretation is that they have got tired of bickering about "the Polish corridor," which intrinsically is a very small matter, and hope that, if they give themselves time, it will either be forgotten or be settled in some sensible way.

Surveying the whole scene, we have the prospect of an interval, which there was not in the previous period, before we need come up to another great divide.

But any survey brings us back to the point that the Franco-German quarrel is still, as before the war, the seat of the European malady. If we could imagine this healed, we should be well on the way, if not to eternal peace, at least to peace for as long as we can foresee. France, Germany, Britain and Italy working together could keep the big peace and prevent small wars spreading beyond a limited area. They could do this even if Russia came to life again as an Imperialist European Power. But even if they fail to do this, or Germany insists on standing aloof, the situation is not lost, and we need not immediately fall back into the pre-war schism. Germany has at present no powerful ally.

3

This is the first important difference between now and then. The second is that we have the League of Nations. The defection of Germany and Japan gives it a frail appearance at the moment, but, so long as the other Powers remain and rally the smaller nations to them by an acceptable policy, it should still be an instrument of great power.

But if we are to make it so and keep it so, we shall

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have to clear it of a good deal of myth, rhetoric and other things which, as Bacon says, do better in poetry where transcendencies are more allowed. The chief disaster of the League of Nations is that it has been trumpeted as a great and final institution, whereas in fact it is only a modest beginning. Had its character been a little less grandiose, there would have been less temptation to make what is now the imposing gesture of seceding from it.

The more clearly we have in our minds that a real international authority cannot be composed of States, each of which claims to exercise sovereignty, the nearer we shall be to inducing the States to waive their sovereignties to the extent that will enable such an authority to come into existence. It is, therefore, a misfortune that the constitution of the League should have cloaked its inherent weakness under the form of requiring unanimity for its decisions. Not perceiving that this form confirmed the States in their sovereignties, the great mass of people have insisted on regarding the League as a super-national executive authority and cried out that it has failed when it has expressed opinions which it was unable to enforce. This has discredited it and prevented it from exercising the influence which within its limitations it ought to have. If these limitations are known and acknowledged, we may in time get some of them removed, but if we imagine the League to be something bigger and greater than it is and have the truth brought home to us by a crescendo of disillusion, it may perish in discredit.

The handling of Japan by the League was a case in point. At the back of the whole business was the fact

known to everybody, and most of all to Japan, that the League could not enforce its views on Japan if she chose to resist. She occupied a position in which, even if the European nations had been willing to undertake it, her coercion was to all intents and purposes a physical impossibility. There were no bases for an attacking fleet ; even for an overwhelming force the task of defeating her must have been one of the greatest danger and difficulty. All the Admiralties were agreed on the point ; it was certain that none of the Governments would risk their naval power on such an undertaking. Nevertheless, the League proceeded to address Japan as if it were a supreme authority with the power of coercion, and the European press, believing the League to be such an authority, told the statesmen composing the Council that it and they would be deeply discredited if they did not bring the Japanese to heel. They therefore proceeded to bluff, and the Japanese knowing better than anyone else that it was bluff, proceeded to call the bluff. So safe an opportunity of snapping its fingers at a world in arms was seldom offered to any country, and the Japanese, being by this time on the highest of high horses, snapped at it greedily and made the most of it.

Suppose that instead of handling the affair in this way the League had started out on the true assumption that its power in such a case was only that of persuasion, it is still of course possible that it would not have prevailed with Japan, but it would not have enlisted all the patriotic fervour and pride of the Japanese people against it, and it would have given argument and reason a fair trial. More important still, the discredit

of failure, if failure there had been, would have fallen on the Japanese and not on the League.

## 4

To say this is merely to say that the League, like all human institutions, must act within the limits of its power. So far as it does this, it will gain power ; so far as it tries what is beyond its power, it will lose what power it has. The cases in which its sanction can be applied are very few in the present state of the world, but this need not at all interfere with its main objects, which are to pronounce impartial opinions on the questions brought before it, to provide the machinery for conciliation, and to give the statesmen of different countries regular opportunities of conferring with each other. What it has chiefly to contend with in carrying out these objects, is the belief that it is not an unprejudiced body expressing impartial opinions and trying to reconcile different points of view, but a *bloc* of Powers strongly interested in maintaining the post-war treaties against those who wish to revise them—in fact a reincarnation in a new form of the Three Emperors' League for the purpose of keeping Germany down, as it was the purpose of that League to keep France down. How to clear it of that suspicion is now one of the most anxious of the problems that it raises.

## CHAPTER X

# THE DILEMMA OF THE LEAGUE

### I

**I**N the light of subsequent events it was a misfortune that the League should have been hitched on to the Treaty of Versailles. Whether the Treaty could be brought up to the level of the League or whether the League would be dragged down to the level of the Treaty was from the beginning a doubtful question. But at that moment the League offered salvation to millions of doubters in the victorious countries who thought that large parts of the Treaty were harsh and unwise but hoped, as President Wilson did, that the Treaty with the League would be a kind of Ithuriel's spear healing the wounds that it inflicted. I myself at the time could find no argument but this to defend the Treaty. But this depended on the Powers composing the League interpreting the Covenant in that spirit and making serious use of Clause XIX which provides for revision. It is true that large parts of the Treaty, especially the occupation of territory and reparations parts, have been revised, but generally under a pressure of events for which the League could claim no credit, and on certain definite questions such as the Upper Silesian plebiscite, and the Austro-

## THE DILEMMA OF THE LEAGUE

German Anschluss, the League acted in such a way as to give colour to the German suspicion that it was in reality a French *bloc*.

It is of course a mistake to blame the Peace treaties for everything. The old Europe had torn itself to pieces before it came into the hands of the treaty-makers. They did not destroy the Austrian Empire or create the Succession States ; that Empire had destroyed itself and the Succession States were ready-made. They did not restore the Kingdom of Poland ; it had restored itself by the time the war was over. All over the field a large part of their subject-matter was given material which they could do nothing but register, but in innumerable details, reparations, war guilt, occupation of enemy territory, disarmament, treatment of enemy property, the Treaty of Versailles was coloured by the French idea of a continuing quarrel with Germany, and in the eyes of Germans the League Covenant took on that colour.

### 2

The circumstances which explain, if they do not excuse, the proceedings in Paris in 1919 are only too clear as we look back on them. Wild electioneering had extinguished the traditional British impulse to spare a defeated enemy and France could not contain her wrath. Her territory had been defiled and devastated ; the war had been carried on with a ferocity which left the bitterest memories. Enemies who played the game of war according to the old rules might salute each other and shake hands at the end, but warriors who discharge poison gas, bomb open

cities, sink without trace, kill and drown women and children, must not expect mercy when the end comes. Among the other characteristics of the modern kind of warfare is that it makes a wise peace all but impossible. "Never again" was the cry that went up from the victorious nations, and "never again" meant at that moment that the entire German people must be crippled, impoverished and put out of action for as long a time as anybody living could foresee.

Before the Peace Conference ended France had her special grievance—a grievance this time against her former Allies. She gave up her claim to the Rhine frontier in the belief that Britain and the United States would join in a guarantee of her security. The people of the United States would have none of it, and Britain refused to shoulder the burden alone. Locarno partly filled the gap, but whether Britain will come to the rescue of France depends on the definition of the "aggressor" about which there is so much casuistry that no one can be quite certain. But with Hitler as her next-door neighbour France is hot for certainties. Therefore she will go on arming, if she is not absolutely guaranteed by her neighbours against a German effort, however disguised, to get back on her. All the rest, as she sees it, is talk confusing a plain issue.

I dare not say that, if I were a Frenchman, I should not think in this way. In fact I do think in this way when the question is put in terms of fleets instead of armies and I am asked whether I would like the Germans to build a new fleet to be the equal of the British fleet. But thinking in these terms is in fact a hopeless dilemma for France and for all of us. If France goes

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on arming, nothing can prevent Germany from rearming, and in the race between the two the larger population and greater industrial resources will win. If, on the other hand, she expects other nations to devote themselves to her security alone, and to take the same risks for it as they would in defending their own countries, she is expecting a vain thing. They have a common interest in stopping all sorts of aggression but no sufficient interest to induce them to concentrate upon one aggression. No nation can make itself the centre of a constellation round which the other stars are expected to rotate. The peace aimed at must be a general interest and all nations must have the same inducement for maintaining it. Here the pre-war experience comes in to warn. Even if it could be formed, a French *bloc* to maintain a French peace would almost certainly be as transient as Bismarck's German *bloc* to keep the German peace. The balance of power would be restored, with a high probability that in the next generation it would tip against France.

The difficulty is that politicians and Governments are not thinking of the next generation ; they are thinking of next month, next year and the wrath which would overtake them, if constituents or patriotic newspapers could plausibly say that they had sacrificed the army or navy which undoubtedly gives security for a short time. A few years ago I engaged in a friendly controversy on some of these points with a distinguished French journalist and he said in reply to me that he didn't care a rap for my long-term arguments. He wanted peace in his own time for the people he saw alive round about him. Those who came after must



settle their own problems in their own way. In vain I argued that on the lines he proposed for French policy he would hand on to his successors the disastrous legacy of the Franco-German blood-feud. He said, if so, they must take it up when their time comes. Thus it is that peace in our time may be the chief obstacle to peace for any long time.

All that can be done at present is to set out the conditions in the hope that they may gradually be understood. One thing, however, becomes clearer, as time passes.

All great European Powers have such an enormous interest in the healing of the Franco-German quarrel and the prospect of their being able to stand aloof from it, if it is renewed, is so slight that any one of them which declines to take part in a collective guarantee acceptable to the two Powers chiefly concerned will incur a very heavy responsibility.

3

To rail at national sovereignty carries us a very little way in the present state of opinion. Everything said about it is true. It is incompatible with the establishment of an international order at all corresponding to what we think of as order in the domestic sphere ; the excesses, fervours and ebullitions of the spirit which it encourages are a curse to the world, and it is becoming a very doubtful point whether the virtues that go with it are a compensation for the havoc that it creates. It is a luxury in these times to think of some possible society of the future when the military and naval fire-eaters, admirals, colonels, newspaper magnates, privy-

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councillors, will be haled before some World Police Court and treated with as little ceremony as the Communist agitator who incites to a breach of the peace. Perhaps some day it will be so. But to suppose that an institution so deeply rooted in time, usage and human nature will yield to argument in one generation is to lend ourselves to illusion. We have got to the stage in which we all say that other nations ought to behave internationally, but very few of us are prepared to do the same in our own case. How many Englishmen are there who would really be prepared to submit the British Empire to an international authority empowered to say that it was too big, that its occupation of large spaces with sparse populations was contrary to world interests, that its administration of certain parts was bad and must be reconstituted according to an international model?

Perhaps we ought to be educated to this point, but whether we are is after all the test for our own time. For my own part I say frankly that I am not yet, though I hope I may be, if I return to this earthly scene after the period in which, let us say, Mr. Wells's various revolutions are safely over. (Heaven forbid that any of us should return a moment sooner.) But by that time there would have arisen a different race of men, with different sorts of brains from those with which the present human race is endowed, brains capable of reaching out to the immense problems which the international order will have to settle and of settling them in a way which will universally be acknowledged as wise and just. The difficulty about the international order and the super-State at the

present time is that very few of us believe in the existence of supermen capable of solving our problems in the way that we should acknowledge as wise and just. The nearest approach to a Parliament of supermen that we have seen in our time was the assembly of statesmen in Paris in 1918, and the most merciful and the truest judgment that can be passed upon them is that the problems they were called upon to deal with were beyond the capacity of the human brain. We were in fact thankful when they got to the end of their business without starting a new war among themselves.

So in the end we have to think of the League of Nations not as a Congress of Supermen, but as the meeting ground of the same people, or the same sort of people, with the same limitations, national passions and prejudices, as before the war, trying as best they can to abate the passions and remove the prejudices. If we think of them in this way and cease, for the present at all events, to think of them as a super-national authority, we may begin to see more clearly the foundations on which we must build.

4

It is not at all to be desired that the nations should begin debating anew the constitution of the League and the ways of amendment. If they start arguing on that ground there is no end to the argument and the possible quarrels that may arise out of it. But if there is any institution in the world which needs to interpret its constitution by experience, or what in our own affairs we call custom and usage, it is the League of Nations.

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Experience during the fifteen years of the League's existence has brought home to us certain things which it would be folly to ignore. The League is on favourable ground in all that pooling of knowledge and experience in which there is no question of coercing anybody, and on this ground it is doing quiet work which ought to be recognized as an invaluable contribution to world unity. It is on unfavourable ground whenever it is required to apply sanctions, and if it advances far into that territory on any matter of great importance, it retires baffled by the opposing principle of national sovereignty. We see it manœuvring on the skirts of this territory, postponing, evading, finding excuses for not entering it, and thereby incurring the ridicule of its critics, but in reality showing a perfectly sound instinct about its nature and the limits of its powers.

This applies to "economic" as to other "sanctions." The founders of the League imagined that they could avoid fighting and bloodshed by cutting a recalcitrant country off from its supplies ; and they supposed that it would sit quietly until a sufficient pressure compelled it to give in. Apart from the extreme difficulty of organizing an effective blockade, it is extremely improbable that any nation possessing the power to retaliate, and especially a nation equipped with submarines and fast cruisers, would refrain from using it, in which case the use of force would be as necessary as if the League applied direct coercion, and might easily involve all the world in a cruiser and submarine war. With these possibilities in front of them practical statesmen think a great deal before they constitute

themselves, as in theory they should, the instruments of international justice.

5

I reserve for another chapter the practical conclusions to which a recognition of these facts appears to lead. The point to bear in mind for the moment is that the League is in an equivocal position which cannot long continue. Again and again we see it coming up to a question which it dare not handle lest it be asked to apply its sanction, and then retiring baffled and discredited. This places its friends in a perpetual quandary in their efforts to apologize for it. For instance, I find myself on a League of Nations Union platform and am asked at the end of a lecture, which has avoided every burning question of the hour, what action the League proposes to take about minorities in Germany or about the bullying of Austria by the German Nazis. Perfectly legitimate questions on matters clearly within the competence of the League. I am reduced to saying I hope that "at the proper time" the League will do something. But I know, and probably at least a score among my audience knows, that all the wise men in Europe are doing their utmost to prevent these subjects from being even mentioned at Geneva. They are doing so because they are convinced that, if it came to taking action against Germany, the Powers would be hopelessly divided and that discussion, therefore, would lead to nothing except further to discredit the League. The mere fact that "sanctions" are in the background is thus a positive bar even to the raising of subjects on which the expression

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of an authoritative opinion would probably be of the highest value. The League as it stands is neither an executive authority nor an effective organ of opinion, and it is perpetually falling between these two stools.

## CHAPTER XI

# THE RELATIVITY OF ARMAMENTS

### I

**I**N the year 1908 I wrote a sentence which got me into much trouble with the advocates of peace at that time. It was : "Armaments are for all nations madness and for each nation imperative."

Unless we recognize the truth of both these propositions we are not at the beginning of the Disarmament problem. Together they present another of the "antinomies" into which we bump all over the field of international politics. For a pacifist to deny that for any given country at a particular moment armaments may be salvation, is to run in the teeth of facts which everybody knows ; for a militarist to deny that armaments collectively produce dangerous and absurd results is equally to be blind to the realities.

We can get some light on this matter by considering our own experience before the war. There can be no doubt that the provision of a great navy and an expeditionary force materially helped us and our Allies to win the war and therefore to save us from the catastrophe of a German conquest of Great Britain. There can be equally no doubt that the friction caused by our effort to maintain this navy and the German effort

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to overtake it was one of the causes of the war and to this extent a catastrophe for both countries. These two admissions must be made before we begin to argue the question.

We may get further help in the post-war problem by considering the principal features of the pre-war competition in armaments. First in the order in which I have them in memory was the complete inability of many distinguished naval and military men to perceive that the doctrine of relativity applied to armaments, viz. that the value of a given armament depended on the armaments opposed to it and that you got nowhere if the armaments on your side were balanced by armaments on the other. Lord Fisher believed that his Dreadnoughts would place the British fleet beyond challenge. Admiral Tirpitz could not be persuaded that the British would build as he built. He insisted on regarding every increase to the German fleet as a net addition to its strength and by a simple addition sum arrived at the conclusion that it would reach the point he was aiming at by the year 1914, 1916 or some other supposititious date. The point was always receding, and it was at the end a doubtful question whether the British naval programmes of 1909 and 1912 had not actually lowered the relative value of the German fleet in the subsequent years. The same kind of reasoning was applied to land armaments. All the great increases were accompanied by assurances that this time a new level of security would be reached ; no one seemed to foresee that next year an opponent would go one better and start the race all over again from the higher level.



Next the competition developed a momentum of its own bearing no relation to policy and beyond control by the Governments. If I may quote a passage which I have written in another book,

to beat competitors became not only a condition of security, but an end in itself, enlisting professional pride and zeal in the engineers and designers of the weapons of destruction. The perfect battleship, the latest submarine, the irresistible shell, the deadliest bomb, the newest aeroplane, were regarded by their producers with the same approval and self-satisfaction as works of art by artists and craftsmen. All these producers were telling their respective governments that, if only they were provided with money, they would create something which would out-distance all competitors ; none of them seem to have rightly gauged the capacity of their competitors to do as much or more.<sup>1</sup>

Then behind all this were vested interests making enormous profits out of this gigantic business. In the public mind the odium of this generally falls upon armament firms, but from this point of view it really makes very little difference whether the business of making armaments is done by the Government or by private companies. In either case the makers of iron and steel, the chemical manufacturers and a large number of other specialized industries have an enormous interest in keeping it at a high level and an immense number of workmen are in the same boat. A Government which shuts an arsenal or a dockyard suffers political consequences from which even Labour and pacifist Governments shrink. So many of us are implicated in this business in so many ways that to throw the blame back on armament firms is far too easy a "let-off."

<sup>1</sup> " Fifty Years of Europe," pp. 237-8.

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Finally in the pre-war competition the point of danger was reached when one of the great competing alliances began to realize that exhaustion was in sight and that there was approaching a time when its power, having reached its zenith, would decline relatively to that of its opponents. This point in actual fact was the victory of the Balkan Allies in 1912 and 1913, which Germans and Austrians regarded as a sudden and heavy weighting of the balance against them in the scales of power. The argument is fully set out in the German and Austrian documents and was taken up vigorously by the military staffs of both countries from the autumn of 1913 onwards. The victorious Balkan *bloc*, they said, must be regarded as a net addition to the power of France and Russia, by which the adhesion of Bulgaria would be no compensation. For the present and for some little time to come, the Triple Alliance was still preponderant, but it would not be, if Russia were given more time to increase her armaments and mobilize her immense latent resources in men and materials. It followed that in the military sense now was the time to strike, and that any action taken by Austria to curb the Balkan *bloc* was not to be vetoed on the ground that it would bring Russia to their defence but rather to be welcomed on that ground. All through the last months of 1913 and the early months of 1914 the two Chiefs-of-Staff, Moltke, the German, and Conrad, the Austrian, were confirming each other in this opinion and bringing their joint pressure to bear on their respective Emperors and Governments. The Serajevo murders provided an easy opportunity to translate this opinion into action,

but the documents show that the Austrians, if not the Germans, had made up their minds to act many weeks before the murders took place.

The doctrine of the relativity of armaments had thus at last come home to the leading militarists and they drew the conclusion with correct, if disastrous, logic. There was bound to come a point when one side would see itself in danger of being passed by the other, for all its assurances that each additional effort promised security. When this point is reached the preventive war is on all military grounds the correct move. It would be wrong to say that the Great War was deliberately a preventive war on the part of Germany or Austria, but the belief that the Triple Alliance would lose by waiting undoubtedly supplied a strong motive for forcing the issue when occasion offered. With military advisers at his elbow plying him with this argument it was less surprising that Sir Edward Grey thought it at the time that Bethmann Hollweg should have refused to "press the button for peace" in July, 1914. They promised victory then but not later.

2

That is how the armaments competition worked in the old Europe, and we had better bear in mind its principal stages—assurances of security by each Government to its own people, doubts about security as one effort balanced another, plunge into war when one side was convinced that it was at the top of its power and that its opponents would gain the upper hand if they were given time. In the end all the other

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causes of war were gathered up into a struggle for power in which everything was at stake for everybody. The struggle was bound to be stupendous in proportion to the length and intensity of the competition. The balance was effected with the largest number of men and munitions in the scale on both sides, and it was so nearly true that only the most exhausting and prolonged struggle between the two could tip it to one side.

Counting from the Franco-Russian Alliance to the Great War, this process took about twenty years, and its time-table should be watched as carefully as the time-table I spoke of in the previous chapter. But again there are notable differences between the pre-war conditions and those of the present time. The pre-war competition, or at least that part of it which led up to the Great War, followed on the division of Europe into two camps. That is as true of Britain's part in it, as of any other, for her supposition was, at least from 1900 onwards (the date of the first great German Naval Bill), that she would fight the German combination, if she fought at all. This supplied a measure and a standard for every stage. Each Government said to its subjects, "The opposing group has now brought its forces up to  $X$ , we must therefore have  $X + 1$ , in order to be safe." France said, "Germany, Austria and Italy, the Powers of the Triple Alliance, have so many men and so many guns, therefore we and Russia, the Dual Alliance, must have so many more." Britain said, "Germany is building so many ships, therefore we must build so many more."

Europe at the present time is not divided into two camps, a circumstance which is fortunate for her peace, but which reduces an armed competition to a wild surmise. Who are the enemies real or potential against whom we are to arm? France, I suppose, would say Germany, but that can scarcely be an urgent matter, for granting all that is alleged about the secret armaments of Germany, French strength must for several years to come be equal to any possible attack on her from the German side. Britain? I could plausibly describe at least half a dozen wars which might involve Great Britain. With its immense sprawl all over the world, the British Empire is open to attack by Japan, the United States, Russia, and in conceivable circumstances, France. We say that certain wars are "unthinkable," e.g. with the United States. They are not unthinkable; all we mean is that our policy is to prevent them, so far as lies in our power. We have a definite engagement under the Locarno Treaties to fight a defensive war against any Western Power which may be guilty of "aggression" on its neighbours, and this on a reasonable interpretation may be taken as requiring us to keep such a force as may tip the balance against the aggressor. But at this point there are heard voices warning us of the experience of the Great War and saying that we shall need to be much better prepared than we were for that, if we wish to avoid the same consequences.

No one looking back on the course of quite recent history will venture to say that any of the permutations and combinations which figure in military hypotheses about the future are impossible, or even very improb-

able. If there is one thing more than another which strikes us in the history of the forty years before the war, it is the rapidity with which the nations changed partners in their intricate and giddy dance. Autocratic Russia quits the League of the Three Emperors and joins hands with democratic France ; Britain suspends her quarrel with Russia, supposed to be her hereditary rival and predestined enemy, and makes common cause with France against Austria and Germany, the two Powers on whom in the previous years she had chiefly relied to keep France and Russia in check. Serbia, the protégée of Austria at the beginning, becomes her mortal enemy at the end ; Bulgaria, the spoilt child of Russia at the beginning, joins her enemies when war has broken out. Nothing in the present state of Europe could be more dangerous than to build military and naval hypotheses on the assumption that the present grouping of the Powers will be the grouping of the Powers ten years hence. If we have to think of security in military and naval terms, we are more than ever on an uncharted sea of conjecture.

In the days before the German fleet gave us the measure of ship-construction, we invented what we called "the two-Power standard" for our fleet, and it was generally interpreted as meaning that we needed a fleet as strong as the fleets of France and Russia combined. The hypothesis turned out to be ridiculous, but in competition you must have a hypothetical enemy, and if we resume competitive ship-building we shall no doubt invent one. The least mischievous in these circumstances will probably be

to take the anonymous "aggressor" as the hypothetical enemy and to say simply that we are providing ourselves with an armament which will secure our own territory against invasion and enable us to weigh in effectively against him, if we are required to do so. But, if we make this our standard, it will be quite as important to guard it against the inflation which would cause it to be regarded as a menace to neighbours who have no aggressive designs, as against the deflation which would deprive it of its virtue. For if an armaments race sets in, it will be an illusion to suppose that the innocence of Great Britain will be as much taken for granted by her neighbours as it is by herself. In international affairs neighbours judge their neighbours solely by their capacity to do mischief.

Which means in the end that whatever we do or our neighbours do, there is no security in a world in arms. The best is a choice between different kinds of insecurity. No nation can be what it calls "secure" without making its neighbours feel insecure, and starting them on attempts to recover "security," which make everybody insecure. But whereas in the old Europe this process was regularized and simplified by the Alliance system, in the new there is no limit to it. When we have done our utmost and bankrupted our tax-payers and lowered the level of life, it will still be possible for a vigilant and martial press to point to gaps which are not closed, dangers which are not insured against. And they will be quite right, for such a world will always be very dangerous, and on any short view of "security" more and



more armaments will be imperative. The limit in that world is bankruptcy which compels all to take the risk.

## 3

There is yet another important respect in which the new Europe differs from the old. The old Europe had a quite definite idea—largely, it is true, a wrong one, but still definite—of what war was or was going to be. It said that so many men, so many guns, so many battle-ships would win victory or establish security. The new Europe has apparently not the slightest idea of what a war will be like, if there is a war. No two naval officers agree about the kind of fleet we ought to have ; no two soldiers about the effects of poison gas. According to one school, we need not trouble about anything else, because our cities will be wiped out and our dockyards and arsenals destroyed by attacks from the air before we have time to look round. According to another, the effects of poison gas are grossly exaggerated and we shall find that to win a war we need the same kind of army and navy as before but this time equipped with a new and very expensive kind of mechanism, about the nature of which there are almost as many opinions as there are staff officers and engineers.

The effect of these controversies on one layman during the last few months has been to raise an extreme doubt whether all the debates about Disarmament at Geneva are not irrelevant, and whether it matters much what the nations decide to do or not to do. For the presumption seems to be that those



who are best prepared will be wrongly prepared, and most liable to be taken off their guard by some new and deadly device which has not even been mentioned in these conclaves.

This on the whole seems to me to be the most encouraging aspect of the entire situation. For what statesman in his senses could plunge his country into the incalculable hazard of war in the present befogged state of military science ?

Here we get to the final and what should be the decisive difference between the old Europe and the new. No statesman in the old Europe ever committed his country to war unless he was advised by his General Staff that he could win and win at not too great cost. The dominant theory of war—war as a “ continuation of policy ” was a theory of successful war ; it was always nonsense for the defeated party. “ Blood and iron ” was your own iron and other people’s blood. In each of his wars, Danish, Austrian, French, Bismarck was advised by his General Staff that victory was certain. In 1914 the two military chiefs, Moltke and Conrad, were persuaded, and so advised their Governments, that the Schlieffen plan was a sure and short road to victory. What General Staff in these days would guarantee victory or at all events guarantee it at any cost less than the destruction of what the victorious country would regard as its most treasured possessions ?

Whatever may be man’s inhumanity to man, it is difficult to imagine it stretched to the point at which men calling themselves statesmen would “ press the button ” for the kind of war which we are now asked

to contemplate. At this point one would suppose the *horror naturalis* would forbid. And indeed, in spite of the new Nazi militarists, there are signs that the glorification of slaughter is on the wane, among them the general acceptance of the Kellogg Pact as if it were a trite expression of the obvious. So far from that, the proposition that war is "not a legitimate instrument of policy" is a most daring, if most welcome, innovation in thought. That war was such an instrument and that all Governments must be prepared to use it in support of their policies and their prestige, were assumptions which none but a few Quakers questioned before 1914. However they might be wrapped up, they were the major premiss of diplomatic negotiations up to that time. Nearly always in the background, when statesmen addressed one another, was the veiled threat that if a particular Government failed to make its view prevail by argument, it might or would be compelled to try "other means."

To read the documents of those times and compare their forms of speech with those employed in these times, is to become aware of a certain change in the atmosphere in regard to war. The modern statesman at least pretends that the making of war is barred by the law of nations. This may as yet be only the homage which vice pays to virtue, but, as someone has said, if you give him time, man often succeeds in living up to his hypocrisies. Our hope is not that war will be abolished by machinery to keep the peace, but that given time the opinion against it will harden and solidify until it is written off in the unwritten

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code of human behaviour. There are, I think, some encouraging signs that opinion is moving in this direction, but it needs time, and the most important of all the objects of practical statesmanship in international affairs is to give it time.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE LEAGUE

#### I

SUPPOSE that for the present we reconcile ourselves to the fact that the League of Nations must be mainly an advisory body and suppose that we have to register among its failures that of persuading the nations to make any serious reduction in their armaments, must we fold our hands and merely watch the drift of events? Surely not. The League has the wide field of opinion open to it, and more than ever the duty of cultivating it.

Whatever happens the collective defence of peace will remain the duty of the League. In any case it should persist in appointing the supervisory authority which will keep us informed about the state of the world's armaments and the kind of war they threaten if there is a war. If the half that is said about the probable nature of the "next war" is true, there could be no greater contribution than this to the growth of opinion against war and the final creation of that *horror naturalis* which will one day forbid it. Objections there are, of course. Governments, we may be told, will refuse to give the necessary informa-

tion or they will give misleading information. But the Government which refused would lay itself under suspicion, and concealment is only possible within limits. The reports would be near enough to the truth. Competent chemists would be able to say what poison gases are available and what is their destructive power ; air experts would speak with authority about the war in the air. A technical branch studying the lessons of the past, might even bring home to the Governments and their naval and military experts the law of relativity in armaments and induce them to consider whether a central clearing-house in which proposed additions could be cancelled against each other might not actually promote " security " as well as be of common benefit to tax-payers.

2

Side by side with this supervisory body, I see another body keeping watch over the whole scene and marking the danger-spots on the political map. This would have its historical research department which would make a deliberate effort to invert the common saying that the nations never learn from experience. It would, for example, have ready at hand all the experience gained in the British-German naval competition, or the Franco-German military competitions before the war, and be able to show the present generation their consequences and reactions and the extreme probability that, if the nations took the same road, they would go to the same or a worse result. It would have the same facts ready about the pre-war alliance system and be able to expose the inherent logic which

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causes one alliance to give birth to another. All this knowledge it would make public and so provide undisputed material for education in a manner beyond the reach of any historian writing in one country or propagandist body appealing to a small audience of the converted. It might in time become the memory of the world—at present the most atrophied of all its organs—and even be on the way to become its conscience. For to such a body and such a body only could we safely trust the definition of the “aggressor” in the manner required by the post-war treaties. Without such an authority all the legal definitions, are likely to break down. All the aggressors in history have claimed that war was forced upon them and nearly all have been able to make a plausible legal case.

I think of this body as continuing to function even if war broke out in the teeth of its opinion. As wars are now conducted, they create a gulf between belligerents, in which peace has no chance until one side has beaten and exhausted the other. They can only meet one another furtively, in disguise, at wayside inns, in constant fear of being discovered and denounced as traitors to their respective causes. To have neutral ground on which, in spite of the state of war, they can meet without prejudice and consult with neutrals, would be greatly to improve the chance of shortening war. It is impossible to read the story of the abortive peace negotiations in 1916 and 1917 without feeling that if there had been such recognized neutral ground in those years, they would probably have succeeded.

If we are thinking of the problem in terms of force, the most promising field seems to be the air.

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Commercial aviation is more and more feeling the inconveniences of national boundaries and purely nationalist organizations. Internationalism for civil purposes and then finally for security in war and against war seems a natural line of development. But here, too, education is needed all the time. The point at which the nations will make the necessary waiver of their sovereignties is only likely to be reached if their civil populations can be brought seriously to believe—what is probably the truth—that uncontrolled national aviation threatens all with destruction in war. We shall then get the desired International air-force to keep all under control.

### 3

It is highly improbable that either the Council of the League, which consists of practical statesmen thinking of action next week, or the Assembly as at present constituted, could undertake these duties. But it is surely not impossible that they should create the necessary body and give it the same freedom to express its opinions as it gives to the economic experts and men of science whom it enlists for its humanitarian work. We keep repeating that the League cannot act in advance of opinion, but only the League can create the kind of opinion which will enable it to act. Hitherto it has been caught up in a dilemma of its own making. Fearing to be committed beyond its powers, it has expressed timid and halting opinions on questions of the hour and neglected the broad and general opinion which may in due time enable it to act. The remedy is to make a clear distinction between

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the League as an Executive authority and the League as an organ of opinion. In its former capacity its scope is as yet very limited and it will of necessity be driven to the shifts and compromises which belong to practical politics. In the latter capacity its field is unbounded and it should speak its mind without fear or favour. In this capacity it need demand nothing of its members but acceptance of the Kellogg Pact and a sincere desire to make it a reality.

No doubt at this point the practical politician will break in with his objections. He will say that such a division of functions as I suggest is impossible ; that the executive body will encroach upon the organ of opinion, that statesmen will intrigue and threaten to prevent its expressing a free opinion, when such an opinion is inconvenient to them, that disinterested men cannot be found, and so forth. Some of these objections are real ; some fanciful or exaggerated. The body I am thinking of would not spring into existence in any perfect form. It would have to fight for its life, like most other human institutions. But if it is really impossible that world or European affairs should be handled by any body of men in a disinterested and impartial spirit ; if such a body of men may not even speak their thoughts and the signatories of the Kellogg Pact are not willing that the public should be educated in the principle to which they are pledged, we must abandon the hope of an enduring peace.

### 4

History will probably one day record that the present phase of intensive nationalism was the last



struggle of the sovereign States to resist the process which in a thousand ways is unifying the world in spite of itself. But while it lasts it is a dangerous phase and its organized propaganda of militarism needs to be met by an organized propaganda of peace. It is not enough for the young pacifist to say he will not fight and then leave the field to the Goerings and the Goebbels. If the Goerings and Goebbels prevail, he will not have the option ; for the war will come to him, even though he will not go to the war. In a fighting world the choice for the pacifist may very easily be how much dirt he will eat. He may object to fighting, he may be too proud or too religious to fight, but every normal human being has in his mind some point at which he will fight and die rather than submit. His chance of not fighting lies in the building of a world which will know how to live at peace, and to that he must contribute his part. The experience of these fifteen years makes it pretty evident that this is not going to be done by forcing other people to keep the peace. It must be done if at all by developing the institutions of peace and creating an opinion which will not tolerate war.

It is one of the misfortunes of these times that the keeping of peace fell into the hands of men who were habituated to war and the violent methods that it encourages. Their faith in the power of opinion and knowledge had burnt low ; their thoughts dwelt on imposing their will and enforcing the peace by " sanctions." When these failed they have been powerless against the resisting forces which they have largely created by their own efforts and failures, and some of

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them would have us believe that peaceful methods have been tried and found wanting. It is not so. What has failed has been the attempt to enforce peace under penalties ; a peaceful effort to promote peace has scarcely begun.

I can imagine somebody saying at this point, what is the use of it all, if nobody at the end is obliged to *do* anything ? This is to have too little faith in the power of opinion and knowledge. In the present state of the world we have to reconcile ourselves to the fact that international justice inverts the order of municipal justice. The international authority will only be invested with the power of enforcing its decisions when it has convinced the world by experience that it can be trusted to make such decisions. That may take a long time, but we need not conclude that because we cannot do everything, we can do nothing. Those who advocate all or nothing in the sphere of international peace will probably get nothing. The modesty which realizes how much of an evil it is necessary to tolerate is the way of advance here as in most other human affairs.

## CHAPTER XIII

### YOUTH AND AGE

#### I

**H**ERE is a digression, but not irrevelant to the main theme.

The intellectual youth is a small minority in the aggregate of young men, but it has always loved extreme views. Those who remember old times must smile a little when they hear of the alarming manifestations of modern youth. In my day at Oxford we could never get far enough to the "left," as the moderns call it. We were Home-Rulers (long before Mr. Gladstone), land-restorers, Socialists—Ruskinian, Morrisian, even Marxian. I think I remember voting for a resolution declaring "property to be an obstacle which exists in order to be removed." We made a speciality of collecting and bringing up to Oxford extremists of the hour whose appearance was most likely to alarm our elders. In my year of office as President of a certain Radical club, I collected John Dillon (straight out of Kilmainham Jail), H. M. Hyndman and Henry George—not a bad bag for those times. My brother added Michael Davitt who got "screwed up" in University College where he was spending the night by the indulgence of the

authorities. The appearance of Henry George brought the young Tory die-hards, who would now be called "Fascists," on to the scene, and our meeting broke up in a noisy confusion which led the distinguished visitor to say that, familiar as he was with Western America, he had never in all his experience seen young men who behaved with such unintelligence and ferocity as the students of Oxford University. Then the London papers began to take notice, and authority warned us to be more careful in future.

All the same I do think I detect a difference between then and now. We never thought of ourselves in any collective sense as "youth"; we were not conscious of any grievance against our elders. On the contrary, we had all the Victorian sense of reverence for the elders—the great group in politics, science, literature, religion which then dominated the scene as no elders do in these days. We did not take it as flattering to be called young, and we looked upon it as part of the natural order of events that we should have to take our place in the queue of all ages when our time came. In these days all that seems to be changed. There is now, if one may so express it, a sort of youth-consciousness, which the old and middle-aged recognize as a new thing, something corresponding to the "class-consciousness" of the workers, and promoted by the same sort of propaganda. Youth is now treated as a corporate something with common interests, claims and grievances which necessarily bring it into collision with age. In this theory the youth-and-age conflict is as inevitable as the class-conflict in

the theory of the Communist. Hence a peculiar bitterness in the thoughts of the young intellectuals of this generation which also is a new and a rather disturbing thing.

2

In particular they allege that old men made the war from which the young men are now suffering. That is to say they cut the stream of time in half at or about the year 1914, and from the fact that everyone born after that date is young, they infer that everyone who lived before it was old. It does not seem to occur to them that all generations are of all ages, and that the pre-war generation was exactly like the post-war generation in this respect. The Government which decided to enter the war was in point of fact of a rather lower average age than most post-war Governments ; the country which all but unanimously endorsed their decision contained the usual proportion of old men, young men and middle-aged men ; and the young men who sealed the cause with their blood were—if one may say so with respect—not more infirm of mind or less capable of forming a judgment about the policy of their country than the young men of to-day.

The fallacy which cuts the stream of time in this way is worth examining if only because it leads in some young men to a peculiar kind of morbidity. Recent literature is full of the complaints of a “ doomed generation ” supposed to be expiating the guilt of the elders who laid this curse upon them. There could hardly be a more enervating thought. There are of

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course a great many hard cases demanding all possible consideration—children born or in the nurseries during the years of war, children robbed of their parents, others deprived of their normal education—but it is not helpful to label them as a disabled class with a grievance against their elders. The great majority are not disabled, and some born in those years appear to have exceptional endowments, as though they had been stirred to an abnormally vivid life by the stress of the times. There is a general idea, which cannot be quite unfounded, that this is the soil for genius, and the modern youth had better be told this than encouraged to think that it is doomed. After all, these are enormously interesting times to have been born into, and if there is anything an old man may be jealous of in the young, it is that they will see and know so many things that he will not.

The quarrel of youth and age dates at least from the time of Noah and his sons, and probably a great deal earlier. Youth has always felt that it is blocked by age, and age that youth is treading on its heels. The conditions of youth have certainly been a little aggravated in this generation because, owing to taxation and the loss of their savings in the great catastrophe, many old men have been compelled to go on earning a living in positions which would be better occupied by young men. If we must generalize, it would be truer to say that the present generation is in danger of being unduly weighted by age than that the previous generation was a generation of old men. Youth does well to resist this process and it is doing

so with some success, if one may judge from the large number of youthful appointments and youthful successes in art, literature and drama that are reported year by year, but it is no necessary part of this desirable self-assertion that we should be required to believe that there is a special kind of youth doctrine, youth outlook on life, which requires the subversion, inversion and total eradication of something else called the old man's or senile view of life. This is what seems to me new about the modern youth movement, and I think it ought to be resisted by men and women of all ages, including the young.

3

What is this supposed youth doctrine? If one looks across Europe to-day, the manifestations of it are extraordinarily diverse. The youth movements of Germany and Italy are ebulliently nationalist and patriotic; the youth movement of England prides itself on being defiantly pacifist. The German youth wages fierce war on Communists, the English affect Communist ideas. The Germans chase the pacifist through the streets, the English vow that they will not "fight for King and Country." All alike profess to be acting in the name of youth, and all have the sense of a mission which requires complete indifference to other people's feelings. Of course I am aware that the English lads when they passed their notorious resolution were only trying to "debunk," according to their favourite Americanism, a sentimental phrase which they supposed to have been abused by their elders to lure the young men of a previous generation

to their doom. They invited the retort that if the previous young men had not been willing to do what they did, the present young men would in all probability not have been debating this proposition in the free atmosphere of the Oxford Union Society, but that was the least part of it. The inversion implied a view of events before the war which could scarcely have been taken by any intelligent man who lived through them, or, one would have thought, by any lad who had read Sir Edward Grey's speech on the eve of war. The sentimental appeal to King and Country would have fallen flat, if it had not been backed by what the immense majority thought to be an overwhelming moral argument. The young men of the present day are entitled to argue that this argument was erroneous ; but they are not entitled to suggest that the young men of the war-generation were the foolish dupes of a sentimental phrase.

There was a little more in it than that. Their resolution touched something beyond good taste or bad taste, patriotism or anti-patriotism, militarism or pacifism. It was deeply wounding to a multitude for whom this battered phrase, if it must be so called, was a memory hallowed by a million graves. Could youth, they asked, be so cruel as to make it the football of a juvenile debate ?

But this sort of thing follows when the inversion of the former times is made an object in itself. It becomes an obsession, which blinds and distorts the mind and is fatal to any steady view of life and history.



Turning things upside down has always been more or less the sport of youth. We knew it in the 'nineties, when Wilde and Whistler set the fashion, and every clever young man thought it a duty that he owed to himself to add a polished pebble to the cairn of paradox. Very distinguished literary men, like Mr. Shaw and Mr. Chesterton, have carried the game on from that time to this, and have something to answer for in spreading the fashion, but the modern youth has brought it to a perfection which those older practitioners can scarcely have dreamt of. What is old must not only be turned upside down, but definitely recognized as the enemy of the new. "These dreadful old men," says a modernist young student in my hearing, as he goes the round of the National Gallery, and I have to get into my head that he really means it. To him, a devotee of the Post-Picasso non-representational school, they are the enemy. "These dreadful old Victorians," says the young poet, and away into space go Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne, Matthew Arnold. They too are the enemy. So with the "dreadful Mendelssohn," and even, in recent days, the "dreadful Wagner." And then a number of middle-aged and even old men, fearing to be left behind in this march of youth, scratch their heads, sit down and invent elaborate theories, which most of the young men would never have thought of, if left to themselves, to prove the subtlety and beauty of the new point of view, and the stern duty of being absolutely intolerant about it.

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How refreshing to turn from all this to the tribute which Berlioz, himself a very modern man in his day, paid to one of "these dreadful old men" in a letter to Liszt :

Wagner is wrong in not considering the Puritan Mendelssohn as a richly endowed personality. When a master is a master, and that master has always honoured and respected art, one must honour and respect him too, whatever be the divergence between the line you follow and the line that he has followed.<sup>1</sup>

### 5

The literature which survives is always in some sense the literature of truth, and in their zeal to invert the wisdom of the elders, many young authors seem to be straying farther and farther from that central common ground where the truth about humanity is likeliest to be found. Their territory grows smaller and smaller, until it becomes the private preserve of a few initiates. I have recently read a volume on poetry and criticism by Mr. T. S. Eliot, who is a famous beacon to young writers, and he tells me at one point that meaning in poetry is like the "bit of nice meat" which the burglar throws to "the house-dog,"<sup>2</sup> something conceded to animals like myself, just to keep us quiet, while the poet does his furtive business. At this point I did literally throw the book at the wall, for I felt not merely mystified but hoaxed and sold. I had spent a great many patient hours in trying to discover the meaning of Mr. Eliot's poems, "The Waste Land"

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by A. W. Ganz in a letter to *The Times*, March 3, 1934.

<sup>2</sup> "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism," by T. S. Eliot, p. 151.

and "Ash Wednesday," and now I discovered that my hours had been wasted. All I should have got, if I had succeeded, would have been the bit of meat thrown to the dog. All the rest, and the greater part, would have remained the secret of the few initiates who have a private key to the something beyond meaning which the words without meaning are supposed to convey.

The method of inversion covers the whole field. It is the ruling presumption that what the elders considered beautiful should now be considered ugly and vice versa. They thought certain metres and lyrical forms to be beautiful ; these must now be discarded and something as nearly as possible the opposite put in their place and proclaimed as the modern and only idea of beauty. They thought lucidity a virtue ; obscurity must now be a deliberate cult. They thought a certain reticence to be seemly ; nothing therefore must be veiled by the modern explorer of human nature. They were romantic ; therefore romance must be barred. I take up the poems of a gifted young man, and find not a few which thrill and charm. But suddenly he seems to break off, as though saying to himself, "If I go on in this way, I shall be quite like one of the old men, and they will begin to say that my poems are beautiful." So he puts the brake on with a crash and gives me pages of (to me) unintelligible grinding and twisting, which have the desired effect of making me say he is a true modern.

I am assured by my juniors that Joyce's "Ulysses" is really "it," and again I apply myself to it. Certainly

this man has a power of words and a vehemence and energy in expressing himself which are the marks of genius. But he assaults me, stuns me, and leaves me breathless and bewildered after about a hundred pages. I have a sense of Rabelais, Carlyle, Swift, Sterne and Smollett all boiling together in one cauldron. He does not, as the censor seems to fear, seduce my senses, but he does very often compel me to hold my nose. Anyhow, I can't go on, and I have very serious doubts whether anybody, outside a little cult of Joyce worshippers, has ever read this book through from beginning to end. It is a task at the best requiring infinite leisure, patience, and a gradual hypnotism of oneself, until one falls into the mood in which it is written.

The professional critic may face it, but for the rest of us life is too short ; and though art be long, it still has to face the fact that life is short. The terms which literature has to make with life are the most delicate part of its business. Genius out of control, thinking of nothing but itself, runs to waste and topples over into insanity ; genius condescending to the vulgar soon ceases to be genius. Somehow, sooner or later, it must conquer the middle range where the intelligent sit in judgment and expect to be addressed in language intelligible to them.

To suggest that this is easy, or to attempt to define this territory, would be a gross presumption. Looking back over a comparatively short period, one has seen immortality conferred and snatched away, the obscure and the derided winning their places among the immortals, the proscribed of one decade becoming

the favourites of the next, what is difficult to one generation becoming easy to its successor. One must always persevere with the difficult in the hope that it may become easy, that it may, in fact, as Coleridge said, create the taste by which it is judged. The thing to remember in this business of imaginative word-spinning is that thoughts are chords and words are single notes. The poet writes his one-part song with the feeling that the thing within him is richly harmonized, and he can only express it note by note. He struggles and agonizes and carries his readers out of their depths, but if he is a great poet he wins through, and produces something which invests meaning with magic for *them*. It is the impossible achieved. If he is not a great poet, he may despair of expressing his meaning, and then say defiantly that poetry has no meaning. And having said this in his haste he will go on to state it as a theory to which all poetry must conform. All poetry, that is to say, must be subdued to his imperfect practice. If his poetry is without meaning, no poetry must have meaning.

A modernist writer quotes in a faintly derisive voice Mr. Gladstone's tribute to Lord Tennyson : he " wrote his song upon the heart of the people." So Victorian, so like Mr. Gladstone, so appropriate to Lord Tennyson. He gives me to understand that a really modern writer would bring an action against Mr. Gladstone, if he were alive and said the same thing about him. As if the " people " could judge of poetry ! The illustrious line of bards, psalmists and prophets who have done precisely this thing, and are acknowledged as immortals only because they have done it, are

nothing to this writer, and I should no doubt earn his contempt, if I were to say that I would rather have written "Abide with me" than the whole corpus of what he calls modern poetry. It is nevertheless a great part of this highest art to write what sinks into the memory of common folk. Deliberately to cut themselves off from the rhymes, metres, and lyrical forms which clutch the memory is for young writers a wilful abdication. Free verse may have beauties and merits, but it is seldom quoted or remembered. The greatest of all the qualities of poetry is that it is remembered when prose is forgotten.

If from some little experience of fashions and schools in art and literature, I were presuming to advise young men, I should say first of all, beware of theories. They are nearly all theories to justify imperfection and many can be traced back to the imperfections of individual artists or writers. The familiar saying that nothing dates so quickly as the up-to-date is sadly verified on looking back. One thinks regretfully of the really gifted men and women who, starting out with a new theory of writing or painting, drifted farther and farther from the main stream and finally landed in a backwater where they were totally forgotten. A very few in all time have had the power to divert the main stream into a new channel, but for all the rest to lose touch with the main stream is destruction. Inverting the wisdom of the elders conceived as an object in itself carries the great majority into stagnant backwaters.

So I believe it to be in politics, journalism and the public life. Here least of all can the stream of time

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be broken and a future be imagined which is cut off from the past. The stream can within limits be diverted and led into new channels, but one part of the stream has always to make its terms with other parts. After all, this is only to say that life is a much bigger and greater thing than one generation of living men, and that some humility is proper in the approach to it. This is no hindrance to good and progressive politics or literature, but it may sometimes give pause to those who want everything their own way in their own lifetime. There are limits to the right of any one generation either to destroy the past or to prejudice the future.

## CHAPTER XIV

### WAYS OF ADVANCE

#### I

“**I** BESEECH you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken.” Is there any apter quotation for the world to-day than these words of Cromwell’s to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on the eve of Dunbar? Europe is infested with political popes shouting infallible dogmas and using the methods of the Holy Inquisition to force them on the unbelieving. Large parts of it seem to be passing into an age of political persecution, which threatens in some respects to be worse than the religious persecutions of former times, since the religious Pope left you alone when you had made submission to the Church, whereas the totalitarian Pope requires submission to him to cover the whole of your life. If his dogma does not fit humanity, humanity must be made to fit his dogma. Perish the Kulak who obstructs the Communist idea; away with the Jew who casts his shadow on the racial creed; down with the Liberal who doubts the totalitarian faith. Nazis, Communists, Fascists may differ about other things, but they are all one in the belief that their doctrine is absolute and final, and that they are empowered by whatever gods



they worship to force it down the throats of their fellow-beings.

Even in the free countries theorists and dogmatists are loose all over the field, all inflated with the idea that they have a right to experiment with their theories and dogmas on their fellow-creatures. I recently listened to a lecture by a professor who seemed to be complaining that humanity was not laid out on the pattern required by science. He appeared to say that if it were perfectly strapped down by a method which he called "complete socialism" and certain persons called "scientists" were then called in, they would perform operations which would effect a certain cure. He spoke condescendingly of politicians, whom he said were more to be pitied than blamed, since, being imperfectly educated, they could not be expected to understand "scientific method." It never crossed the mind of the professor that this method, as he expounded it, required humankind to be emptied of what is commonly called "human nature."

But the politicians also have fallen into the mood ; they too are certain that they possess the truth, and have more and more contracted the habit of claiming infallibility for their different versions of it. The democracy is said to require it ; the newspapers demand it. "*We* can cure unemployment, *we* can banish depression, *we* can bring prosperity ; nothing less, no half-way houses, no compromises, no pottering in the manner of the 'old politics.' " And then to present the cure in the highest light, the condition of the patient has to be painted in the deepest black and portraits of the sufferer, as he is now, presented side

by side with portraits of what he will be when he has taken the infallible medicine. Yet looking out on the world to-day and seeing the conflict of opinion about seemingly simple things, the enormous mistakes made by even wise and well-intentioned statesmen, the widespread misery and unhappiness that have followed, the constant defeat of theory by unsuspected facts, the absence of anything that can justly be called political science—it does not seem much to ask that the politician shall approach his task with a certain modesty—even with a prayer of humble access on his lips.

Rubbish ! says the political manager. What sort of candidate would this man make ? They want it hot and strong, no humming and hawing and qualifying. A memory comes back to me of an occasion nearly fifty years ago when, as an emissary of the Eighty Club, I made my first political speech to a London audience. I was half-way through and nervously hoping I was doing not so badly when I felt my coat-tails pulled violently by a Boanerges sitting behind me who said in a loud voice, “ Young man, don’t argue, hit ! ” And yet, even now, I wonder. The method of hitting and not arguing does seem, in its aggregate result, to have got the world into such unnecessary difficulties that a reversal of it even at this late hour seems worth trying.

Suppose, *per impossibile*, the next Minister planning for Agriculture were to approach the public saying something of this kind : “ I am asked to do something which is extremely difficult—nothing less than to harmonize the interests of producers and consumers and to ensure the former of a good profit without bearing

hardly on the latter. In order to do this I have to make up my mind on a dozen uncertain factors—how much bacon the public will consume at a given price, how much milk it will drink, again at a given price, what supplies are coming in from abroad and can be kept out, and what from British Dominions and must be let in. I have colleagues and a party watching me, half of whom will say that I shall ruin the Government if my prices are too high, and the other half that I shall ruin the farmer if my prices are too low. No man before me ever had such a job, or carried it through successfully ; nevertheless, I will try, but I must warn you in advance that I shall certainly make the most serious mistakes, and I must claim the liberty, when I do make them, of retracing my steps and trying to discover a better way.”

Now since everyone is aware, or should be, that these are actually the conditions of planning in any large way for a modern state, would it not be an advantage to start by stating them fairly, and so enlist the sympathy and help, which are cheerfully given to an honest man doing his best, but invariably withheld from the dogmatist who is sure he is right and is determined at all costs to force his plan upon you ? Might it not in the long run be better for a Minister to do this than to cut off his own retreat and put himself in a position in which he is compelled to go on in the teeth of accumulating proof that he is on the wrong road, until finally he is chased off it by the subjects of his experiments ?

Again, is it really necessary that our planning Ministers should start out into unexplored territory without map or compass or anything to guide them but their own intuitions and guesses, or their own conviction that something called a "constructive programme," or something else called "public control," will carry them through? It probably is if we are only to rely on methods adopted before anyone dreamt of Government being entrusted with these tasks. No better machine exists for ordinary legislation than the British House of Commons. It is full of good sense about everyday matters; it knows where the shoe pinches, it is patient to minorities and anxious to conciliate them whenever possible. But it is economically inexpert, and can do little more than take on trust the numerous and intricate schemes for controlling industry, manipulating tariffs and quotas which are presented to it by Ministers and, as often as not, merely "laid on" its table. Quite as much as the Cabinet, the House, if it is to do its duty, needs its own expert secretariat to examine the nature of these proposals, and report on their probable economic consequences. With this knowledge, its judgment would be of real value, and it would at least act with its eyes open, whereas now it is generally obliged to accept blindly what is offered to it.

If economic planning is to be the function of Governments, this or something like it is an essential piece of machinery. We heard much a few years ago of an Economic General Staff, and for a brief moment it

seemed to come into flickering existence. But it turned out to be no more than an *ad hoc* gathering of experts, summoned or not at the discretion of the Government, and expected to confirm some particular point of view. What is needed is a permanent body, with all serviceable statistics at its disposal, and a record of departmental activities which would enable it to see whether the plans of one conflicted with the plans of others, and if so, to report to the House that they did. It should be free from Government interference, and be subject to no master but the House of Commons.

Alternatively, I can conceive of a reconstituted Second Chamber performing this function. The present hereditary House is completely out of joint with the times. It contains a highly distinguished minority which would be an ornament to any Assembly, but its power resides in a hereditary *bloc* which seldom takes part in its proceedings, but presents itself in force to resist Liberal or Labour legislation. This method combines the maximum of heat and conflict with the minimum of wisdom. The period of delay which it is empowered to impose should be of great value, but it passes in violent agitation which confirms parties in their prejudices and diminishes the chance of smooth working for the disputed measure when it finally becomes law. But suppose the Second Chamber were an economically competent body equipped with such a secretariat as I have suggested, and suppose it were the practice to introduce measures of economic importance into this Chamber and then send them with its report to the House of Commons, we should

get the desired result in another way, and the final decision might be left as now with the House of Commons.

But a House of Commons which stubbornly refuses to make itself representative, which is liable to swings of electioneering emotion blotting out all varieties of opinion, which insists on applying the party foot-rule to measures requiring expert knowledge and practical experience, and holds to a procedure which encourages vain repetition in one part of its proceedings, and applies a blind closure to another part, and perhaps the most important part, is a very imperfect instrument for legislation of the modern kind. To pronounce how it should reform its procedure is beyond my competence, but in general it may be said that no adequate reform is possible, so long as parties cling to the idea that the will of the Government needs to be imposed upon measures which call for the pooling of knowledge and experience. The existence of a Government in a wisely ordered democratic state should depend not on its capacity to enforce its will on a particular proposal, but on its possession in a general sense of the confidence of the Assembly. This is merely to recognize that what are commonly called party considerations are irrelevant to a large part of the stuff of modern legislation.

## 3

These are merely suggestions. The main point is that if Governments are to be entrusted with economic planning, some machinery of this kind is essential. By whatever name it is called, a properly equipped

economic department would enable us for the first time to survey our economic life and see its parts in proportion and perspective. One of its chief instruments would be an up-to-date census of production which would immediately bring to the test of fact a great deal that is now pure guess-work, and enable us to see in what, according to any reasonable standard of life, we were deficient, and in what redundant. This would help the Chancellor of the Exchequer to tax wisely and re-establish in the public mind the invaluable idea of the "priorities"—the first things which should come first—unhappily abandoned when the war was over. Masses of statistics pour out of the departments, but they stun and smother us with their volume, and some of the simplest facts seem to be unascertainable. Nothing to this day is more in dispute than the true reading of the economic history of this country since the war. I see the body I have in mind issuing an annual economic survey of the national life, on the model of the admirable Annual Reports of the Government of India.

Not least we should discover our ignorance and the limits that it imposes on planning for the future. The planning Minister would not start out on a voyage of discovery over unexplored ground. He would advance so far as and no farther than the future can reasonably be foreseen—a territory wide enough for all sane ambition. Let me take housing as a simple illustration. When the war ended it was common ground that there was a shortage of two million houses. To make good this deficiency was a definite task eminently suitable to State planning. The shortage had been caused by

war ; if it went on, the difficulty of making it good was bound to increase, but to make it good in any reasonably short time was clearly beyond private enterprise. But the method was at hand : it was to declare housing a " Priority " in the sense in which that expression was used during the war, and to employ the war machinery for pushing it forward. That would have required sacrifices of various interests, sacrifice of profits by landlords, builders and contractors, sacrifice of Trade Union regulations by workmen, to permit the necessary dilution of labour, control by a public housing authority covering the whole ground—all possible at that moment but increasingly difficult later.

What a splendid opportunity lost ! And yet, as I write these words, my memory goes back to a day spent in visiting one of the great blocks of model flats built soon after the war by an enterprising municipality. They were charming flats with bathrooms and model kitchens, quite suitable for a bachelor in Mayfair. Nevertheless, I took away with me petitions from half a dozen old ladies begging to be allowed to return to the slums from which they had been taken, and where they said they had been " so warm and comfortable." It had apparently not occurred to the enterprising municipality that the new flats would require furniture to match them and coal to keep them warm. The old ladies told me that they could not afford the coal, and that their furniture had mostly gone to pieces in the attempt to move it. So they sat shivering by day in carpetless rooms with a few broken chairs and rickety tables for furniture, and by night they slept on straw mattresses propped on packing-



cases in other empty rooms. These are things which escape the notice of our planning authorities, and unless we can supply them, we shall waste public money by the million and fail to meet the needs of those whom we wish to benefit.

Let us hope they will be remembered when we come seriously to the question of slum clearance. We have at length got to the point (1934) when 1,438 separate schemes have been presented to the Ministry of Health and "provisionally accepted." How much longer it will take before this "provisional acceptance" is translated into action no one knows. Each scheme has to be carefully examined, and numerous private interests have to be bought out or adjusted. In the meantime the crucial question whether we are to re-house the slum-dwellers in the centres of towns in which the slums are generally situated, or to transfer them to suburban and semi-rural areas where new industrial settlements may grow up, remains still in doubt.

I am not for a moment suggesting that the questions raised are easy to answer, or that the difficulties can be overcome by a wave of the official wand. But housing and slum-clearance<sup>1</sup> are precisely the measurable kinds of problems in which State action might be expected to be efficient, and if we have not the

<sup>1</sup> I would add as another example, the handling in some comprehensive way of the "derelict areas" where the local industry is beyond revival. This too is a measurable problem beyond private enterprise. But the planning Minister will have to take into account a whole complex of feelings and prejudices, especially the feeling against migration.

## WAYS OF ADVANCE

machinery for dealing with these, or the inherent difficulties are too great to enable the State to act wisely, catastrophe is certain on the far more difficult and uncertain ground of State-planning for industry in general. In housing, owing to exceptional circumstances, we can rely on a certain and measurable demand, in almost all else we should be working for an unknown and immeasurable demand.

CHAPTER XV  
A NOT IMPOSSIBLE WORLD

I

ALL of us, I suppose, when we make our contribution to public affairs, have in our minds some idea, however dim, vague or remote it may be, of the kind of life we should like to see in our own country. I think of it as a life in which all are assured of a certain standard of decent living, and none above that level are prevented from increasing their wealth by their own efforts. If the poor do not become poorer as the rich become richer, but the former rise in the scale as the latter prosper, I can see no object to be gained by levelling down. The fun of life and the prospect of advancing culture lie in a great variety of free endeavour at all levels. Working for profit is not inimical to the general well-being, and the supposed antithesis between profit and service is really, when one comes to examine it, meaningless. The grocer who supplies me with the kind of tea I want is doing me a service, and he can only make a profit if he consults my tastes and needs. His profit is in fact a guarantee of my freedom, which would be contracted all along the line if I were compelled to buy, as in Soviet Russia, only what the State provides at the

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State price. If I can get these services from my grocer I am not conscious of feeling any grievance if, as is quite commonly the case, he is six times as rich as I am and lives in a style which is far beyond my means.

But I am concerned that my own standard of living should not be depressed, and I do sincerely desire that the minimum standard for my poorer neighbours shall be a constantly rising one. From this point of view I recognize it as a duty of the State to check the kind of profit-making which impoverishes—the ramps of the predatory, the regrating and forestalling practised by conspirators against their neighbours under the forms of modern finance and commerce—and I hope that Mr. Roosevelt's experiments in these directions are being closely watched by our Government and will be repeated here when successful in America. Further, I would have the Government keep its eye steadily on the course of production, and when it was convinced that too much of the wealth and energy of the people was going out in luxuries and superfluities and too little in necessities, fall unmercifully on the luxuries. A society which, on a general survey, was lop-sided in this respect would be ripe for steep additions to income-tax, surtax and death-duties.

### 2

In the meantime to guard and raise the minimum standard should be a conscious object not of Government alone, but of the whole community, leading to a general opinion against lowering wages, stinting unemployment insurance, starving education or health services. We have advanced in this respect by marked

stages. Our minimum a hundred years ago was the food-ration which just kept body and soul together ; it is now a money allowance a good deal higher than the average wage of the former period. In advancing from the one to the other we have had to abandon a good many of the moralities and orthodoxies of the previous generations, and we shall probably have to sacrifice a good many more. The line between the “deserving” and the “undeserving” poor is wearing very thin, and presently it will go altogether. An educated opinion which will guard abuse far more effectively than any means test will by that time have taken its place. If more is necessary, a means test administered by workmen will suffice. The minimum will be at a level which will enable a man to live on it in modest comfort if he chooses so to do, but unless he is artist, priest, man of science, or some other who deliberately chooses it as a means to disinterested work or service, he will incur the same kind of reproach as in the former time a man who lived on the poor-law. The “stigma” will have been raised to the higher level, but in the educated state of opinion it will be quite as effective.

But this assumes that the life above the minimum will still for the great majority be the more desirable life, and that those who choose to follow it will be free to exercise their faculties as they choose, to win fortune and to enjoy it, to compete with their fellow-beings and take the chance of victory or defeat. Why not? What social object is to be gained by levelling them down? It is precisely so that the world till now has got on, and it seems improbable that human nature

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will in any time that we can foresee so change that men will accept a rule of life which encounters their sense of justice by imposing equal rewards for unequal services, or quenches their initiative by transferring their activities and responsibilities to the State.

### 3

It is a vulgar idea of equality which measures it solely in money, and I see very much more at stake here than the equal distribution of wealth. One cannot be long in the United States without becoming aware of something in the relations of human beings there which is lacking in old and aristocratic countries, but which greatly helps in that country to bridge the gulf between rich and poor. Alongside the universal idolatry of money as the measure of success goes the tacit assumption that a man is a man for a' that, enabling rich and poor to meet on equal terms. The obeisances, submissions, marks of respect as from inferiors to superiors exacted or expected by the "upper classes" in old countries have almost no counterpart in the new, and when imported are generally condemned as an intolerable giving of airs. In the new country the rich can behave even more tyrannically and oppressively than in the old countries, but they cannot behave in just this way.

Matthew Arnold said in the eighteen-eighties that the great defect in the English way of living was its lack of equality, and, though that may be a little less true after fifty years, it is still a great defect. The industrial middle-class of the nineteenth century took over from the aristocracy the "upper class" attitude

to the "lower classes," and built up an industrial autocracy which was only gradually qualified by trade-unionism. The condition was aggravated when the public company superseded the private employer, and continued to treat the workman as a class apart from the management and control of the industry in which he had the greatest of all interests. Hitherto he had been in touch with masters of flesh and blood, but he now began to complain that he was a mere cog in the soulless machine of capitalism. The story in the subsequent years has been that of a gradual concession to the workman of a voice in wages and conditions of labour, but a firm stand against his encroachment on management. This is said to be required by efficiency, but it is in effect a denial of equality of status to labour. It becomes more and more impossible for an intelligent workman to believe, as he reads the lists of those who man the directorates of the great public companies, that he has not the brain or the experience of at least some of them.

As I see it, the great failure of capitalist industry has been its failure to take Labour into partnership, and employers had better realize that it leaves them in a dangerous position. For if anything is certain in the future it is that absolutism in industry will not run side by side with democracy in politics. If the employer will not share the control of industry with the workman, the workman will sooner or later use his political power to break the control of the employer. The result may be something worse for industry and worse for the community, as I believe it would be, but the workman will continue to think of it as some-

thing better for himself—something which at all events gives him equality of status and enables him to feel, as his brother in Russia is supposed to feel, that he is no longer an underdog. This aspiration—conscious in some, latent in many more—lies at the root of Labour politics, and it needs to be recognized as something worthy of respect, which must be met on equal terms. I would have the capitalist say to himself morning and evening, “What I call my wealth is only an estimate of what a certain plant will earn based on the assumption that Labour will co-operate with me in earning it. That co-operation is very unlikely to be given me permanently unless I make it a real partnership.”

The failure to enlist Labour is not confined to employers ; it runs through the whole organization of Government. The department which deals with Labour should be adequately staffed with Labour ; the Royal Commission, the Select Committee, the inspectorate with similar duties should be similarly equipped. The chief part of the administration of Unemployment Insurance should by this time have been in the hands of Labour. Workmen who have had long experience of Trade Union and Friendly Society benefits know how to administer a means test, and nobody else does. We need to sweep away the conventions which confine the Civil Service to the black-coated, or determine the composition of Royal Commissions and Select Committees by the strength of parties in the House of Commons. In many of these respects we have scarcely begun to democratize our institutions.



In the end the picture of a free society which presents itself is something of this kind : a Government well equipped with economic machinery making periodical surveys of the whole scene, marking the territory—generally that of measurable demand—in which State-planning may be useful as an adjunct to private planning ; and for the other territory of uncertain and immeasurable demand confining itself to research, experiment and other efforts which may be helpful to the free private adventurer. A Parliament aided by its own economic bureau which will examine the schemes, plans, tariffs, etc., presented to it, relate them to other existing plans, and simplify them to the point at which the parliamentary judgment becomes valuable. In general a state of society in which everyone will be assured a decent minimum of existence—a minimum which will rise automatically as wealth increases. But beyond this the utmost possible freedom for individual enterprise, provided always it is not of the kind that impoverishes, and a state of opinion which puts those who choose to dwell on the minimum under the necessity of justifying themselves to their neighbours. Then an industry so organized that to a minimum living wage is added first a piece-rate according to the work done, then a bonus on profits guaranteed by a generous representation of the workers in the directorate and free opportunities for all ranks to rise to the highest places. The transition may be difficult, but the potential productiveness of the modern world makes such a state of society more than a dream, and in proportion as it came into being it would solve the problem of distribution. What are

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now the indigestible surpluses would be absorbed automatically in raising the minimum and providing more leisure and new amenities for the whole people. At the same time rates of interest would fall and profits tend to a minimum under the influence of abundance.

But the fact must be faced that very few nations, if any, are in a position to bring such a state of society into existence without the co-operation of their neighbours. If the world is bent on organizing scarcity by preventing the free interchange of its products, then unemployment will be chronic and the unrest which leads to revolutionary Socialism or Fascism will continue. Neither of these "isms" can solve the problem, or is even relevant to the greater part of it, but both will continue to assert that they hold the key, and, as Herr Hitler has shown us in his seventeen years' campaign, constant assertion may cause the incredible to be believed. But if no one nation can solve the whole of the problem alone, the nation which has the sense to bring its political institutions into conformity with its economic necessities will have the best chance of coming through unhurt, and in the meantime making life tolerable for its citizens.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A LAST WORD

**L**ET me in the end come back from the not impossible world and try to gather up some of the foregoing considerations as they apply to the actual world.

Any general survey suggests that a large part of the terminology of modern politics has little or no relevance to its subject matter. A division of parties can be imagined in which an administrative Nihilist on one side would declare all Government action to be anathema, and a Socialist on the other would denounce all policies which fell short of his ideal of abolishing private profit and substituting public ownership and control. But in the practical politics of to-day there is no such fundamental division, and in its absence the conventional labels tend to be misleading or meaningless. Liberalism, *qua* Liberalism, has nothing to say to a particular plan or policy unless it definitely carries out some Liberal idea or is in conflict with something conceived as a Liberal principle. The white light of Liberalism loses its warmth and glow when it is passed through a prism and reappears on a screen as a spectrum of constructive policies, most of which have nothing to do with Liberalism. Conservatism when

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it becomes the instrument of change merely disguises what it is about when it describes its action as "Conservative." To me the ultimate Socialist idea is more reactionary than most Conservatism, but it is habitually described as "advanced" and those who hold it are said to be going to the "left" as distinguished from others who are supposed to be going to the "right." Ordinary folk will be well advised to beware of all these epithets.

For in the region in which we are now the question about a policy or a plan is not whether it is a Conservative plan or a Liberal plan, "left" or "right," more "advanced" or less "advanced," but whether it will work, and, if so, at what cost. The world is having a wide experience on that subject, which every country ought to be recording and tabulating for its own guidance, and a few years hence we may be able to draw positive conclusions which will greatly advance the art of government. But in the meantime certain provisional judgments seem to be well justified.

First, by whatever name they are called, all revolutionary policies which require immediate fundamental changes in the institutions of a country are fatal to liberty, democracy, and government by or through Parliament. They encounter obstacles which can only be overcome by the suppression of opponents and the extinction of free criticism, whether in Parliament or the press, or even finally in the streets and in the home. In this respect Socialism differs not at all from Fascism or Nazism. The Soviet policy requires the Soviet method, just as the Nazi policy requires

the Nazi method, and the Fascist policy the Fascist method.

Disclaimers on this subject should never be accepted. The test is simply whether the policy proposed requires the method. If so, the method will be adopted and the Parliament which resists be swept out of the way. At that point a struggle may follow which may bring a different kind of tyranny to the top from that which the authors of the original movement intended. But whichever wins, the result will be much the same, except to the favoured minority, communist or capitalist, as the case may be, in whose interests the government will be carried on. For the mass of working people life is much the same under one kind of dictatorship as under another.

When, therefore, an Englishman is told that a Government coming into power with something called "a clear majority" will proceed to "Fascize" his institutions or to nationalize everything and take control of his money, he will know that this Government, if it is seriously to do these things, must, like other Governments which have done them, constitute itself a tyranny. And at this point he will ask himself whether the game is worth the candle—whether such results as have been achieved in Soviet Russia or Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy are worth the sacrifice of freedom and free institutions, as we understand them in Great Britain. If he thinks not; if he thinks that freedom and free institutions have moral and spiritual values for which none of the results claimed offer any compensation, he will exact of all politicians that their policies keep within the bounds of parlia-

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mentary methods—the methods of suasion and argument with their inevitable gradualness—for he will know that all others, however “advanced” they may be called, will land him in tyranny.

Next when he is called upon to express judgment on plans and policies, he will look with disfavour upon all plans which profess to cover the whole ground of the National life or mortgage the future beyond a brief term. The possibility of error is immensely enlarged with every extension of scope or time. A fractional mistake in a five-year plan for a whole country is a disaster out of all proportion to a similar mistake in a two-year plan for one department. The plain truth is that there is no knowledge in the possession of any ruling class which justifies experiments of great magnitude on human beings. The life of a people is a creative evolution beyond forecast by the most self-confident. For one generation to stamp their pattern on the stream of time would be an intolerable arrogance, if it were possible, as happily it is not.

But between presumptuous leaps into the unknown and helpless waiting on events there is a broad territory which it is the business of Governments to occupy. This is, generally speaking, where private enterprise has failed to meet a measurable demand for things necessary to a decent living, or where services need to be rendered which require the organization of the whole state. There are of course debatable questions and risks to be run even on this ground. Science may bring particular industries like transport or the provision of electric power to a point at which organization by the State is a positive condition of their going

forward. Great private monopolies may threaten the general interests in a manner which requires public control. President Roosevelt's experiments in America should bring us invaluable knowledge on these subjects, and they are the proper material of political debate. For myself I see certain subjects—such as housing and slum-clearance—manifestly presenting themselves as claimants for State action. They represent a measurable demand needing to be supplied with the least possible delay, and private enterprise has evidently failed to meet it.

But outside this territory we are in the unknown and the immeasurable, the ground of the explorer, the adventurer, the researcher whom we positively hinder, if we try to fit him into a preconceived scheme. The State may help him by organizing research, by subsidizing his activities, classifying and co-ordinating his results, but the best service it can render him is to leave him free to go wherever the facts lead him or his own genius opens the way. In this region all theories and isms and all political or scientific doctrine which assumes that a group of people now living know the pattern to which the future will or ought to conform are the enemies of progress.

The ecclesiastical popes have always told us that Liberalism is the enemy. The political popes are now telling us that it is dead. Deep calls unto deep, and advanced politicians echo everywhere that it is out of date. The wisdom of Locke, Blackstone, Burke, Mill, Gladstone, has gone the way of Victorian poetry and Victorian art, and those who thought it a great light are in their graves or far on the dusty road. Its

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last resting-place is Geneva, whence now and again comes a voice, like a bell heard tolling a departed friend, warning the nations that they are threatened with ruin by their apostasy from this faith. It is unheeded and everyone says it is intended for someone else.

Yet somehow one goes back to the old sources with a sense of strength renewed :

The Commons consist of the representatives of the nation at large. Every member, though chosen by a particular district, once he is elected and returned, serves for the whole realm ; the end of his coming thither being not particular, but general ; not merely to advantage his constituents but the commonwealth as a whole. (Blackstone.)

Whilst freedom is true to itself, everything becomes subject to it. (Burke.)

It may be that a large part of the world is doomed for a time to relapse into mediæval ideas of trade and a worse than mediæval intolerance of free thought and the free way of life. It may be that the next generation is destined to live through a period of political persecution just as a former generation lived through a period of religious persecution. But to that also there will come an end. There will rise up again Pym and Hampdens and Garibaldis and Mazzinis proclaiming the old Liberalism as the advanced thought of the new time and calling upon Youth to pass through the fire that it may prevail.

There is no reason why Great Britain should suffer this relapse. Free institutions have deeper roots in her soil than in that of any other country ; their growth and development have been her special pride. They reflect and express the qualities which her



people like to think of as specially their own, tolerance, good-humour, give and take, respect for the rights and feelings of others, even when by an exercise of power it is possible to trample them down. In the main these institutions depend on two ruling assumptions—that a sufficient number of honest and competent men and women are willing to do public service without reward, and that all acknowledge something conceived as the “public interest” above and beyond the advantage of any class or party. If the stream of those willing to serve the State in this spirit runs dry, or if for the public interest we substitute the class victory as the goal of our effort, then parliamentary institutions must go down and the victory end in the dictatorship of the victorious class, whichever it may be. To watch all policies which tend in this direction, and put their veto on any which threaten to break Parliament, are primary duties in these days for those who value liberty.

## MEMORANDA

CIVILIZATION will be achieved when the words human and humane mean the same things. Humanity will then have become humane.

Revolution which is the victory of a class cannot be effected by Parliament which is the trustee of all classes.

Democracy is nothing without Parliament. Democracy commits suicide when it authorizes politicians to suspend or extinguish Parliament.

The sole power possessed by Democracy is that of changing its mind. Those who deprive it of this deprive it of everything.

All Parliaments are groping along the edge of the unmapped boundary which divides the things that can from the things that cannot be settled by argument and reason. Not to push them over is the common interest of parliamentarians.

It is often a temptation to throw the compass overboard and steer by the stars, but those who do are apt to get on the rocks.

The nations which discard Liberalism pay by losing their liberty..

## THESE TIMES

Reformers are in despair at the untidiness of the human nursery, but tidy nurseries often make stupid children.

Fraternity must be added to liberty before equality comes in sight.

The limit of power is ignorance. The omniscient would be the omnipotent.

Apologists for tyranny dig their own graves. The Communist who admires the Russian tyranny falls the easiest victim to the German.

It does not follow that because old men have made mistakes young men are infallible.

The worst enemy of democracy is the demagogue.

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